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JONAH:
PROPHET AND PATRIOT

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Jonah: Prophet and Patriot

By
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TO THE REVERED MEMORY OF THE LATE

THOMAS HART

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE OF THE COUNTY OF LANCASTER
WHOSE STRONG SIMPLE FAITH IN THE INSPIRED WORD
WAS MANIFEST IN A MULTITUDE OF GRACIOUS DEEDS
AND TO ONE CLOSELY RELATED TO HIM AND TO ME
WITHOUT WHOSE SELFLESS DEVOTION AND CONSTANT
INSPIRATION IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN WRITTEN

THIS BOOK IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED

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PREFACE

THIS book represents an attempt to vindicate the historical character of the Mission of Jonah, as recorded in the prophecy which bears his name, and, at the same time, to suggest a method of interpretation which renders the entire narrative consistent and harmonious both in itself and in its connexion with the New Testament references.

While I trust it may not be deemed unworthy of the consideration of scholars, the book has been written mainly with the needs of the general Christian public in view. For that reason a certain amount of repetition has been retained, for the purpose of lucidity of the argument from various points of view. To have a comprehensive statement of the case may prove helpful for many who are bewildered by meeting more frequently with arguments against the traditional view than a reasoned presentation in support of it.

Some may be disposed to treat the argument presented in chapter III as merely novel or ingenious; on the contrary, it is as old as Jerome, the most erudite Bible scholar of the early Church. Recent archæological discoveries in Assyria help to illumine and confirm that presentation. However strongly inclined one is to accept the purely allegorical

interpretation, there is always the testimony of our Divine Lord to be reckoned with. He certainly seemed to accept unquestioningly the historical character of the narrative. That, it was, which compelled me to a more thorough investigation of the subject. And, whatever may be the effect upon the minds of others, I shall always be grateful for having been forced into a sustained examination of the critical theory; because, contrary to all my expectations, I discovered how preponderating is the evidence for the historicity of the narrative.

My thanks are due to the Rev. G. T. Manley, M.A., and the Rev. C. G. Mylrea, M.A., for helpful suggestions and valuable aid in the revision of the proofs.

Controversy in the realm of Biblical criticism is apt to have a measure of acidity imported into it. Where great issues are at stake, that is hardly to be wondered at; but it should, nevertheless, be deprecated by all Christians alike. As a Bible lecturer I take as my motto: "Not Denunciation but Demonstration,"—not denunciation of the views of those who differ, but demonstration of the truth as it appears to me in a spirit of love and forbearance. If in this volume I have failed to write up to my ideal let it be put down to want of thought rather than want of heart.

CHURCH HOUSE,
WESTMINSTER,
Easter, 1925.

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"There is a principle which is a bar to all information, which is proof against all arguments, and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance; this principle is contempt prior to investigation."

—(Herbert Spencer).

"Moreover, this is not . . . only a matter for specialized experts or professional scholars. The discussion has been left in the past too much to them. Religion, after all, is for common men. It is in the region of the common reason, at least as much as in the circles of specialized study, that it must be judged. This is, most noticeably, the assumption of the New Testament. It appeals to the common judgment. It summons each man to judge for himself. 'Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?' 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.' 'He that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man.' These words of our Lord and of St. Paul are a challenge to common men."

—(Gore, "Belief in God," pp. 27-28).

Chapter I

INTRODUCTORY: IS IT HISTORY, ALLEGORY, OR ROMANCE?

Jonah is the worst treated book in the Bible. It is the butt of the scoffer; a ready missile which the infidel rarely fails to hurl at the head of the believer; among many professing Christians it serves only to point an inane joke or to provide an inapt simile. Meanwhile the book remains unread, its contents unknown, the preciousness of its revelation undiscovered and unsuspected.

"Seek and ye shall find." That fundamental direction, given by the Master, applies with special force to the study of Holy Scripture. The characteristic feature of the inspired writings is that their form serves both to reveal and to conceal. What is particularly true of the parables of our Lord is generally true of the Scriptures as a whole, and not least of the Old Testament prophecy which is the subject of our considera-

tion. Because the Book of Jonah is unread or read only superficially, the splendour of its narrative is seldom discerned. For it is not only a gem of literature; a masterpiece of description of rare excellence; described by Charles Reade as the "most beautiful story ever written in so small a compass"; it is also a pearl of divinely revealed truth. Its contribution to the totality of the Divine revelation is so pure and profound, that we can never afford to dispense with it.[1] The character of God therein exhibited reaches, it has been truly said, the high-water mark of the Old Testament revelation; the character of the prophet, as therein presented, manifests qualities which may well excite our admiration, especially in days of eager pursuit of pelf and place and power.

But is the book historical? That is the paramount question. Is the prophecy of Jonah an allegory, or a piece of religious fiction of value because of the moral and spiritual lessons which it conveys; or, is it the veritable record of a series of events, phenomenal in their nature, which, by their actual occurrence, provided a type and foreshadowing of the still more stu-

[1] It was, says Jerome, the means of the conversion of Cyprian, when he was gay and thoughtless.

pendous events associated with the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ? One dreads even to appear to dogmatize. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. But one may justly plead for careful and prayerful consideration, so that the ultimate conviction, whatever its nature, shall be the result, not of mere adherence to a prevailing fashion of thought, but of painstaking and, so far as possible, independent study. It would be calamitous if Christians should ever become, for the most part, mere echoes of a few clamant voices. For the Holy Spirit is a great Distributor; and He deigns often to reveal the deep things of God through the instrumentality of the humble and obscure, who are rich in faith and whole-hearted in quest of the truth.

Sir William Ramsay has testified to the change in his attitude towards the theory of evolution, which was wrought by his coming into contact with the unmistakable marks of deterioration and decadence manifest during his travels in Mediterranean lands. He has also told us how, when he was strongly influenced by critical presuppositions, a detail in St. Luke's geographical descriptions in the Acts, revealing both the truthfulness of the narrative and the date of its com-

position, powerfully arrested his attention and led to a complete change of view. If a personal reference may be made, I venture to predict a corresponding change of attitude for many who, like myself, were brought up to accept unquestioningly, as assured results, certain hypotheses in the realm of Old Testament criticism. For some years after taking my degree in Cambridge, where, as an undergraduate, I read for the Theological Tripos, Daniel and Jonah were for me historically discredited books. I seldom opened them, and scarcely ever taught out of them ; until, in the conduct of a course of lectures, going systematically through the books of the Bible, I was compelled to give some measure of attentive study to their contents. Then it was that I made discoveries which were as arresting as they were illuminating. To my astonishment I found a mass of evidence for the traditional position, the existence of which I had never suspected. The result has been that, after much study and thought, the conclusion has been forced upon me that the evidence for the historicity of Jonah, accumulating as one proceeds and penetrates, outweighs immeasurably all the evidence that has been collected in support of the purely symbolical interpretation of the book.

Such, however, is not the view which is generally held by modern theologians. The allegorical interpretation is widely accepted. Many treat the narrative as a fiction, with or without a very slight framework of history to rest upon. By many the non-historical character of the book is regarded as indisputable. A writer who ventures to maintain the opposite runs the risk of meeting, in certain quarters, with ridicule or invective. Sir George Adam Smith thus declaims: "How long, O Lord, must Thy poetry suffer from those who can only treat it as prose? On whatever side they stand, sceptical or orthodox, they are equally pedants, quenchers of the spiritual, creators of unbelief." [1] A strong case, surely, does not require to be buttressed by the immoderate terms of such an apostrophe. For it must not be forgotten that the great majority of Hebraists and theologians of the Church Universal, from Jerome and Augustine to Pusey and Perowne, are included in the compass of the distinguished professor's denunciation. But mere assertion, however emphatic and exalted the source, is of little value in the present discussion. Truth must in the long run prevail. And, may one venture to assert, what really

[1] *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, Vol. II, p. 533.

needs to be said, that the love of truth is not the monopoly or prerogative of those who are opposed to traditional beliefs. An obscurantist is not necessarily one who is conservative in his sympathies. He may indeed be one so easily captivated or obsessed by what is new or novel, as to be impatient of what is tried and trusted.

In his famous *Analogy*, Bishop Butler remarks that, at the time he wrote, it had "come to be taken for granted that Christianity" was "not so much a subject of inquiry," but had been "now at length discovered to be fictitious." All that remained, therefore, was "to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world." The attitude of many towards the Book of Jonah, in these days, corresponds to that which was adopted towards Christianity in general in the days when Butler wrote. But that attitude, I believe, will be radically changed or greatly modified in proportion as the subject is examined with care and without prejudice.

That the Book of Jonah is neither an allegory nor a religious romance, but a trustworthy historical account of the mission of the son of Amittai to Nineveh, with the events which

resulted therefrom, and the revelation of God's dealings with mankind which it enshrines, is indicated by clear lines of substantial evidence. The following are submitted as worthy of close and reverent attention by every sincere student of the Bible. (i) Jonah himself was unquestionably a historical personage; (ii) the narrative bears upon its surface the impress of historicity; (iii) Jewish tradition, in one unbroken line, testifies to a belief in the historical character of the book; (iv) the Christian Church, with remarkable unanimity has confirmed the Jewish tradition; (v) the testimony of Jesus Christ, in reference to the recorded experiences of Jonah, is eviscerated of its force and significance if the historicity of the narrative be rejected; (vi) the belief in the historicity of Jonah is further supported by the realisation of the paucity of positive evidence to the contrary; and (vii) the consistency of the narrative is maintained, its harmony becomes clearly manifest, and the revelation it mediates grows more luminous, when its historical character has been clearly apprehended. These lines of evidence will be carefully investigated in the following chapter.

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"The criticism of old truth from some newly discovered point of view is easily made effective. The answer is not effective, not easy. The position attacked is an old one, whose strength depends upon a long gain of truth through many ages. The hole in the wall made by a well-aimed shot is seen and known of all men. But the stout foundations which make the breach insignificant, these cannot easily be displayed; perhaps they cannot be displayed at all. Perhaps belief in them can only be produced by a long consideration of many features of structure within our reach, above the ground level."

(Waggett: "Religion and Science," pp. 49-50).

Chapter II.

THE EVIDENCE FOR ITS HISTORICITY

In presenting the evidence for the historical character of the Book of Jonah, we begin with the prophet whose name it bears.

(i.) Jonah himself was unquestionably a historical personage.

He was no more a myth than was Elijah or Elisha. Only a glimpse is given us into the nature and scope of his ministry; but it suffices to provide a foundation in actual history upon which to build our argument and interpretation. In 2 Kings xiv. 25, it is written: "Jeroboam restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel which he spake by the hand of His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet which was of Gath-hepher." Here is a distinct reference to the conquests of the king in intimate connection with the ministry of the prophet. The one is as historical as the other.

Whatever be the date of the composition of the book, there can be little doubt as to the time of the prophet's ministry.

Jeroboam II was the greatest sovereign who, since the days of Solomon, had occupied a throne in the midst of God's ancient people. He reigned over Northern Israel for the long period of forty-one years. Religiously, he followed in the idolatrous footsteps of his namesake Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin ; but from the standpoint of military achievement he was surprisingly successful. He enlarged his domains so that the kingdom became almost as extensive as was that of David. His restored or conquered territory embraced a district some two hundred miles north of Samaria, reaching as far as Hamath, which belonged to the Hittites, the most powerful race of ancient Canaan, and as far South as the Dead Sea.

Now this remarkable extension of territory was, it is recorded, a direct fulfilment of a prophecy uttered by Jonah, who apparently stood to Jeroboam II in a relation corresponding to that occupied by Elisha to Joash, his father.[1] That the prophet whose ministry is thus described in 2 Kings is the same as that mentioned in the

[1] 2 Kings xiii. 14—19.

prophetical book which bears his name, cannot seriously be questioned. There is a three-fold identification. Both in the history and the prophecy Jonah is described as the son of Amittai; in both his place of residence is said to be Gath-hepher; in both his office is indicated to be that of a prophet. Nowhere else in the Old Testament does the name Jonah or the name Amittai occur. Gath-hepher, situated about an hour's journey to the north of Nazareth in Zebulun, is identified with the modern village of El Meshed, where, according to a well-founded tradition, which dates from the time of Jerome, the tomb of Jonah is pointed out. Tradition further identifies him as the son of the widow of Zarephath, who became the personal attendant of Elijah. Without attaching any particular value to these traditions, we have, in the historical reference in 2 Kings, a clear indication of the date of Jonah's ministry. Jeroboam II reigned from 823–782 B.C. It was probably early in his reign that Jonah's prophecy was fulfilled. Ewald writes: "It follows clearly from the words in 2 Kings xiv. 25–27, that this Jonah uttered the prediction neither long before nor long after the accession of Jeroboam II, especially as the king according to all appearances won his great victories very early. Jonah's

prediction, therefore, must fall in with the childhood of Jeroboam or in the first commencement of his reign." [1] We may then, with considerable assurance, fix the date of Jonah's ministry as near the close of the ninth and the beginning of the eighth century B.C. He was thus the direct successor of Elijah and Elisha as a prophet of Northern Israel, and the senior contemporary of Amos and Hosea.

As to the authorship of the book, there is no certain evidence to prove that it proceeded from any other than Jonah himself. The fact that it is written in the third person is quite consonant with Hebrew prophetic usage. It is the exception rather than the rule for a sacred writer to speak of himself in the first person. Its graphic style harmonises with the character of the prophet who is portrayed in its pages. Moreover, it has been the uniform tradition among the Jews that Jonah himself wrote the story of his mission, and on that principle alone was his book placed among the prophets.

But if it be admitted that Jonah himself is historical, while the story in the prophetical book is thought to be only an allegory or religious romance, why, it may pertinently be asked, did

[1] *History of Israel*, IV. p. 124.

the author of that fiction presume to exhibit a recognised Hebrew prophet as acting in violent opposition to the expressed will of Jehovah? A fictitious name would have served the purpose equally well. It is much easier to believe that Jonah in his prophecy has given a faithful account of his disobedience, and the unprecedented experience which followed, than that one of his fellow-country men, writing under the influence of Divine inspiration, chose to make use of the son of Amittai as the principal actor in an impossible religious drama. The former can be paralleled in the Old Testament writings, in the faithful portrayal of their sins and failures by men like Moses and David; the latter is without parallel, and contrary to all we know or might anticipate. Kalisch, writing from the standpoint of the theory of a historical romance composed long after the time of Jonah, recognises this difficulty, and asks: "Was the author justified in imputing to an old and honoured prophet such bitterness—nay such meanness?" And the only solution he offers—a very unsatisfactory one—is: "We must therefore ascribe that feature to the author himself, who thus wronged both his hero and his composition." [1]

[1] *Bible Studies*, Part II, pp. 122–134.

(ii.) The Narrative bears upon its surface the impress of Historicity.

Anyone reading it for the first time would certainly regard it as purporting to be a piece of history. There is not a statement in the book to lead the reader to think otherwise. The style of the narrative resembles that of the histories of Elijah and Elisha, with their many supernatural occurrences. The book is an account of what befel the prophet, but so written as to convey a revelation of God, like the experiences of Elijah on Carmel and Elisha at Dothan. Its opening phrase, "And the word of the Lord," is the common formula with which the historical books like Samuel, Kings, Ezra and Nehemiah begin. The Hebrew form of commencement is an indication of historicity. "As the historical books are joined on to the sacred writings before them, so as to form one continuous stream of history, by the 'and' with which they begin, so the book of Jonah is tacitly joined on to other books of other prophets by the word 'and' with which it commences." [1] Its correspondence with Hosea and

[1] Pusey, *Minor Prophets*, V. p. 7.

Joel and other prophetical writings is immediately noticeable by the opening sentence, "The Word of the Lord came to," which is the formula commonly employed to describe the Divine commission to prophesy. It thus bears from its beginning the stamp both of history and inspiration. Its contents throughout correspond. The city of Nineveh is described, and the conduct of the Assyrians is portrayed, in a manner quite accordant with what is certainly known from profane history and monumental records, and suggests that the account proceeded from an eye-witness.

But for its miraculous features, it is doubtful whether the narrative would ever have been regarded as otherwise than historical. The phenomenon of the preservation of Jonah in the deep seems so extraordinary that, on *a priori* grounds, the historicity of the book is by many promptly rejected. The supernatural element throughout the Bible is a stumbling-block to not a few who have not sufficiently reflected that without miracle a Divine revelation could hardly be authenticated. I must, however, postpone the consideration of this important section of the subject to a later chapter.[1] All I wish to urge here

[1] See Chapter V.

is that it is unfair to reject the story because it is so extraordinary; that, indeed, the extraordinary character of the events described might reasonably be cited as evidence for, and not against the historicity of the narrative. Like the supernatural incidents in the life of Jesus, and the utterances recorded of Him who spake as no other man ever has spoken, it may be easier to believe that this Old Testament story is a piece of history than a product of imagination. In an illuminating book, dealing with the New Testament narratives, Professor J. A. Robertson, of Aberdeen, has said: "It is often a first principle of this type of (historical) criticism that truth must always be commonplace; it cannot on any account be allowed to be stranger than fiction. We assert on the contrary that truth is nearly always stranger than fiction." [1] The phenomenal character of Jonah's mission affords no ground, by itself for the rejection of its historical character.

[1] *The Hidden Romance of the New Testament*, p. 8.

(iii.) Jewish Tradition, in one unbroken line, testifies to a belief in the Historical Character of the Book.

A problem of considerable magnitude, which confronts the modern critic, is to explain how it has come to pass that, for at least twenty-one centuries, the Church of God has believed implicitly in the historical character of Jonah's mission. The place of the prophecy in the Canon of the Old Testament is, in itself, proof that the ancient Jewish Church believed it to be historical and Jonah himself to be its author. In the Greek Septuagint Version, made early in the third century B.C., it occupies the same position as in the Hebrew Bible. It could not have been where it is had not the Jews who lived at least three centuries before Christ believed it to be historical. That is a fact which must not be lightly disregarded. Moreover it is strongly supported by collateral evidence. In the apocryphal Book of Tobit, which Ewald and Bishop Westcott believed to have been written about 350 B.C., there is a clear reference to the prophecy of Jonah, which illustrates the Jews' belief in its historicity. Tobit,

on his death-bed, addressing his son Tobias, gives him parting counsel in the words: "Go into Media, my child, for I surely believe all the things which Jonah the prophet spake of Nineveh, that it shall be overthrown. . . . And now, my child, depart from Nineveh, because those things which the prophet Jonah spake shall surely come to pass." [1]

Philo, the Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, who was born about 20 B.C., believed, as his writings testify, in the historicity of the book. Josephus describes Jonah's mission very much as it appears in our canonical scripture, except that he confuses Tarshish with Tarsus, and represents the prophet as having been cast up in the Euxine Sea. But of its historical character he evidently has no doubt. Now it is surely a great assumption on the part of certain modern scholars, without any indubitable evidence to depend upon, that Philo and Josephus, together with the author of Tobit, the translators of the Septuagint, and the compilers of the Canon, were all mistaken in regarding Jonah and his mission as historical. They almost certainly had access to sources of information which have long since perished. Their testimony is surely of greater weight than any

[1] xiv. 3, 4, 8.

modern conjecture can possibly be. Bishop Welldon has sensibly argued: "It is not credible that the Jews should be and should always have been mistaken as to the character and origin of their sacred books."

The choice then lies between this plain testimony which has come down to us over the intervening period of twenty centuries with marvellous unanimity, and a series of modern critical conjectures, which will probably prove to be as ephemeral as they are novel. What is called the Science of Historical Criticism is not exact science. There are no canons of criticism by which such a bulk of ancient testimony can safely be disposed of. As Bishop Creighton said: "Historical criticism is not a science: it is only an investigation of the value of evidence. It rests on presuppositions which are derived from experience. I am disposed to believe what is analogous to my experience: my criticism is awakened by what is not analogous. The destructive criticism of the New Testament rests on the presupposition that miracles do not happen. . . . The real question in dispute is the conception of nature. Biblical criticism will not solve that question." [1] Jewish testimony to the historicity of Jonah stands like

[1] Quoted by Gore, *Belief in God*, p. 229.

a rock; the waves of modern criticism have beaten against it, but have not shaken it; and my conviction is that it will stand when they have receded.

(iv.) The Christian Church, with a remarkable degree of unanimity, has confirmed the Jewish Tradition.

Apart from the testimony of our Divine Lord Himself, which we shall presently consider, there has been a striking consensus of belief in the historicity of Jonah from the earliest days of the Christian Church and for eighteen centuries onward. It is only in quite recent years that it has been seriously questioned, save by the scoffer and avowed sceptic. The Catacombs in Rome bear striking evidence of the belief of the early Christians. No Biblical subject was more popular for mural and sarcophagal representation, in those underground cemeteries of the disciples of Jesus, than that of Jonah's submergence and deliverance as a symbol of faith and hope in the resurrection. "The history of Jonas having been put forward so emphatically by our Lord Himself, as a type both of His own and of the general resurrection, it is not to be

wondered at that it should have held the first place among all the subjects from the Old Testament represented in the Catacombs. It was continually repeated in every kind of monument connected with the ancient Christian cemeteries; in the frescoes on the walls, on the bas-reliefs of the sarcophagi, on lamps and medals, and glasses, and even on the ordinary gravestones. Christian artists, however, by no means confined themselves to that one scene in the life of the prophet in which he foreshadowed the resurrection, viz., his three days' burial in the belly of the fish, and his deliverance from it, as it were from the jaws of the grave. The other incident of his life was painted quite as commonly, viz., his lying 'under the shadow of the booth covered with ivy on the east side of the city' for refreshment and rest; or again, his misery and discontent, as he lay in the same place, when the sun was beating upon his head and the ivy had withered away." [1] Jerome, the greatest Bible scholar of the early Church, wrote a commentary on it; and the sermons and writings of Irenæus, Augustine, Chrysostom, and other Fathers, abound in references which show conclusively that their belief in the historicity of Jonah was unquestioned. A

[1] Northcote and Brownlow, *Roma Sotterranea*, p. 243.

long and bitter controversy was waged between Jerome and Augustine as to the nature of the plant which overshadowed the prophet; but, as to the historical character of the narrative itself, they were absolutely agreed.[1] Augustine wrote with reference to the miraculous phenomena: "I have heard this kind of enquiry ridiculed by pagans with great laughter." Pagan philosophers, like Porphyry, may have rejected its historicity. No trace exists of such a proceeding by Christian theologians of the first six centuries. Calvin, Luther, and the great Bible scholars of the Reformation period, never questioned it. It is only within the past half century that Christian theologians and preachers have arisen to do so; and that, I submit, on very slender grounds. It is again a bold assumption that the Christian Church of all the centuries has been utterly mistaken in its interpretation of Jonah's mission, and that it is only in these latter days that scholars have appeared sufficiently able to correct the mistake! Here, surely, it is apposite to quote the weighty words

[1] "So conservative were the African Christians in the fifth century, and one may add so well instructed in the Scripture, that, in the story of Jonah, when the word *cucurbita* (a gourd) was changed by the bishop who read the lesson into *hedera* (ivy), the whole congregation protested, and would not allow the lection to proceed till the word to which they were accustomed was adopted."—Foakes-Jackson, *History of the Christian Church*, p. 415

of the learned Bishop Lightfoot: "It may be that the historical sense of seventeen or eighteen centuries is larger and truer than the critical insight of a section of men in our late half century."

(v.) The Testimony of Jesus Christ, in reference to the recorded experiences of Jonah, is eviscerated of its force and significance, if the historicity of the narrative be rejected.

It was towards the close of His earthly ministry that the unbelieving Jews came, demanding from our Lord the performance of some miracle which would once for all authenticate unmistakably His claim to Messiahship. For three years he had given signal proofs that He was sent from God. But they refused to acknowledge Him, and hardened their hearts. In response to their insistent demand He uttered these extremely significant words: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet: for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the

belly of the sea-monster; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." [1] The only additional sign or portent that would be vouchsafed to them as a credential of His Divine mission would be His resurrection from the dead! In that declaration the Son of God Incarnate endorsed the historical character of Jonah's recorded entombment and deliverance, and pointed to the prophet's experience as a type and foreshadowing of His own death and resurrection. But a still more emphatic attestation by Jesus Christ of this Old Testament narrative follows. In reference to the persistent unbelief of the Jews, He uttered a most solemn warning: "The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it! for they repented at the preaching of Jonah: and behold, a greater than Jonah is here." [2]

The testimony of our Divine Lord ought to be conclusive. This has always been for me the insuperable objection to the allegorical interpretation of the narrative. The attempts which are made to overcome the difficulty appear to be as perilous as they are unconvincing. The allegorical theory is, on the outside, so plausible that it is

[1] St. Matt. xii. 39–40. [2] xii. 41.

accepted by many without a realisation of the gravity of its implicates. Any hypothesis which creates bigger problems than it solves ought to be regarded with suspicion. And the reasons which are given to dispose of Christ's testimony to the historical character of Jonah give rise to serious problems indeed. They may be summarily described as three-fold. The passage in the Gospels must be an interpolation, and Christ never uttered the words; or, if He did utter them, He was accommodating Himself to the ignorance of His hearers, knowing that He was quoting what was only fictional; or, if He uttered them believing the record to be historical, it must be assumed that He Himself was liable to error. Let us examine briefly these suppositions.

The passage about Jonah in the Gospel narratives is said by some to be an interpolation.[1] Christ, they affirm, never uttered the words; they were introduced into the Gospel narrative from some extraneous source which is utterly unknown. To reason thus is to employ the weapons of the enemy. For the manuscript evidence is of the highest character. St. Matthew's record appears also in the third Gospel with no substan-

[1] Thus Bewer (*International Critical Commentary*, p. 10): "Almost all N.T. critics regard Mt. 12^{40} as a gloss or interpretation by the evangelist."

tial difference; and no historian of antiquity stands on a higher platform of trustworthiness than St. Luke. Both his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles will bear the strictest scrutiny by the modern historical critic. And the statements themselves are of such a nature that only the Divine Lord, we believe, could have uttered them. The theory of interpolation is destitute of even a shred of evidence.

It is more frequently argued that our Lord was merely speaking parabolically. Dr. Plummer, who apparently is satisfied that it is not an interpolation, in his comment on the passage in St. Matthew, reasons thus: "Our Lord's mention of Jonah as preaching to the Ninevites does not require us to believe that the story of Jonah is history. . . . If our Lord had said, 'As the rich man killed the poor man's ewe lamb, so ye rob the fatherless and the widow,' would that have proved that Nathan's parable was literally true?"[1] The obvious reply is to point to the significance of the "if." Had Christ said such a thing, our judgment in the matter of Jonah would probably have been greatly modified. The fact is that our Lord never did make such a solemn asseveration upon such a flimsy foundation.

[1] *Exegetical Comm. on St. Matt.*, p. 183.

Again, it is idle to affirm that our Lord was only making use of a piece of historical fiction, just as we might quote out of a scene in *Macbeth*, or a chapter in *Pilgrims' Progress*. It is difficult to believe that any preacher, whose aim it is to convince, would court the ridicule of a congregation by uttering a warning of such momentous import based upon a purely fictitious example, saying in effect: "Because you refuse to be actually converted, the Ninevites, who were parabolically converted, will rise up as witnesses in the Great Assize to condemn you." Perowne puts the case concisely and convincingly in the words: "Is it possible to understand a reference like this on the non-historic theory of the book of Jonah? The future Judge is speaking words of solemn warning to those who shall hereafter stand convicted at His bar. Intensely real He would make the scene in anticipation to them, as it was real, as if then present, to Himself. And yet we are to suppose Him to say that imaginary persons who at the imaginary preaching of an imaginary prophet repented in imagination, shall rise up in that day and condemn the actual impenitence of those His actual hearers, that the fictitious characters of a parable shall be arraigned at the same bar with the living men of that generation." [1]

[1] *Cambridge Bible: Jonah*, p. 15.

When compelled to admit the authenticity of Christ's recorded words and their plain signification, the critic usually falls back upon the theory of accommodation. Stated briefly, that theory implies that our Divine Lord in His teaching accommodated Himself to the ignorance, the superstitions and the prejudices of His hearers. The fact is that Jesus Christ did not so accommodate Himself. On the contrary, He was continually resisting the erroneous beliefs of the bulk of His contemporaries—disciples and friends as well as enemies and persecutors. Witness His fierce denunciation of the Pharisees who made the law of God of none effect by their teaching; His withering reply to the Sadducees, beginning with the words, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures"; and His rebukes to His own disciples for their dulness of spiritual apprehension and slowness to believe all that the prophets had spoken concerning Him. To argue that our Lord accommodated Himself to a popular but mistaken belief respecting the mission of Jonah, is to make an assumption which is entirely groundless.

When the plea of accommodation will not serve, then resort is had to the more extreme theory of the *Kenosis*, which deprives our Lord Jesus Christ of His authority as an absolutely

trustworthy Teacher. No theory ever propounded has rested upon a more unstable foundation. The passage in Scripture commonly referred to in this connection is Phil. ii. 7, "He made Himself of no reputation." [1] But Dr. Moule, the late Bishop of Durham, a classical scholar and a spiritually profound theologian, has shown how unwarranted it is to base such a theory on a passage which rather proves the opposite. In his *Philippian Studies* [2] he wrote: "We are beset at the present day, on many sides, with speculations about the '*Kenosis*' of the Lord which in some cases anyhow have it for their manifest goal to justify the thought that He condescended to be fallible; that He 'made Himself void' of such knowledge as should protect Him from mistaken statements about, for example, the history, quality, and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. I have said once and again elsewhere that such an application of the 'made Himself void,' Ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν, of this passage (from which alone we get the word Kenosis for the Incarnation) is essentially beside the mark. The Kenosis here is a very definite thing, as we see when we read the Greek. It is just this—the taking of 'Bondservant's Form.' It is—the becoming the absolute Human Bond-

[1] R.V., "He emptied Himself." [2] Pp. 99–101.

servant of the Father. And the Absolute Bond-servant must exercise a perfect Bondservice. And this will mean, amidst all else that it may mean, a perfect conveyance of the Supreme Master's mind in the delivery of His message. 'He whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God.' *The Kenosis itself (as St. Paul meant it) is nothing less than the guarantee of the Infallibility.*[1] It says neither yes nor no to the question, Was our Redeemer, as Man, 'in the days of His flesh,' omniscient? It says a profound and decisive yes to the question, Is our Redeemer, as Man, 'in the days of His flesh,' to be absolutely trusted as the Truth in every syllable of assertion which He was actually pleased to make. 'He whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God.'"

[1] The italics are mine.

(vi.) The Belief in the historicity of Jonah is further supported by the realisation of the paucity of positive evidence to the contrary.

The arguments which are usually presented in support of the non-historical theory are, apart from those which revolve around the miraculous phenomena, much more unsubstantial than would be supposed by many who have not carefully investigated the subject. They are chiefly of a subjective kind; some are mutually contradictory; not one can be regarded as convincing.

It is, for example, urged that there is no reference in profane history to the conversion of Nineveh, so graphically described in the book. It is difficult to treat this kind of objection with patience. Before we believe the historic statements of the Bible, must we always have confirmation from an outside source? The demand is unreasonable. Moreover, it comes too late. That the *argumentum ab silentio* is of little weight is generally admitted. It is never weaker than when resorted to for refutation of Biblical

history. For the plain fact is, that for much ancient history, we have absolutely no source of information outside the Bible. Little more than half a century ago knowledge of Assyrian history was all but limited to what was recorded in the Old Testament. Since then the revelations of archæological discovery have not nullified but remarkably confirmed the historical statements of the Bible, while many critical theories have been exploded. Belshazzar, said the critic, never existed. Such a name could not be traced in Assyrian royal records. The fifth chapter of Daniel was therefore treated as unhistorical. But what had been regarded as an " assured result " of criticism was violently disturbed when Professor Rawlinson unearthed inscriptions, which recorded the name of Belshazzar, and revealed the illuminating fact that he was the son of Nabonidus the last king of Babylon ; that, though he was not king *de jure*, he was, certainly from the fourth month, when his father was taken prisoner, until the eighth month, when he himself was killed, the regent or acting king ; which fact enabled Bible students for the first time to understand why he could only offer the reward of the third place in his kingdom, the second being occupied by himself ! Like instances

could be multiplied. The fourteenth chapter of Genesis, the learning and culture of Egypt in the days of Moses, as Biblically represented, and the national existence of the Hittites, were all once thought to be unhistorical, until the silence of profane history was broken by archæological discovery, when the Scriptural records were confirmed. No weight, therefore, can be attached to the plea that Assyrian records do not contain any reference to the conversion of Nineveh. Religious revivals are not always recorded in state annals! Already we possess proof from the cuneiform tablets that the Bible account of Nineveh's repentance is described in a manner which exactly coincides with Assyrian custom. "It was just such a fast," says Professor Sayce, "as was ordained by Esar-haddon when the northern foe was gathering against the Assyrian empire, and prayers were raised to the Sun-god to 'remove the sin' of the king and his people. 'From this day,' runs the inscription, 'from the third day of this month, even the month Iyyar, to the fifteenth day of Ab of this year, for these hundred days (and) hundred nights the prophets have proclaimed (a period of supplication).' The prophets of Nineveh had declared that it was needful to appease the anger of heaven, and the

king accordingly issued his proclamation enjoining the solemn service of humiliation for one hundred days." [1] The humiliation of the beasts likewise, was a custom not unknown in ancient days and in lands with which the Assyrians were familiar. Herodotus tells us that, when the Persian armies were in Greece, a battle was fought in which a general, universally esteemed, was slain. "On their arrival at the camp," says Herodotus, "the death of Masistius spread a general sorrow through the army, and greatly afflicted Mardonius himself. They cut off the hair from themselves, their horses, and their beasts of burden, and all Bœotia resounded with their cries and lamentations. The man they had lost was, next to Mardonius, most esteemed by the Persians and the king. Thus the barbarians in their manner honoured the deceased Masistius." [2]

Again, it is frequently argued that the use of the past tense in the sentence, "Now Nineveh *was*" [3] (iii. 3), proves that the book was written after the destruction of the city in B.C. 606, and therefore by someone far removed from Jonah's age. Thus Professor G. A. Smith writes: "One verse implies that when it was written Nineveh had ceased to be a great city." A little reflection,

[1] *The Higher Criticism and the Monuments*, pp. 489–490.
[2] ix., 24. [3] הָיְתָה

however, will reveal how unstable is the evidence which is relied upon for a statement which many critics repeat with a great show of assurance. It is significant that Dr. Driver, a distinguished authority on the Hebrew tenses, did not resort to that plea for an argument. He knew, of course, that De Wette, a learned Hebraist and critic, had already exploded it. In his Introduction, the latter says: "The statement respecting the size of Nineveh (iii. 3) is of no importance in determining its date." Other Hebraists like Pusey, Keil, and Perowne have confirmed that statement. A modern critical scholar makes the frank though qualified admission: "The fact that Nineveh's greatness is spoken of in the past tense ('Now Nineveh was,' etc.) is not in itself conclusive that the city was no more, although it is most naturally understood so." [1]

The narrative being in the past tense, the reference to the size of Nineveh follows, in accordance with Hebrew usage, in the past tense also. A corresponding instance occurs in Genesis iii. 1: "Now the serpent *was* more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made." Perowne has also shown how unsafe it is to reason from a tense, even in the New Testament, by quot-

[1] Lanchester: *Cambridge Bible*: *New Series*: *Jonah*, p. 41

ing from St. John's Gospel: "There *is* at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool (v. 2); and, later on in the same narrative: "Bethany *was* nigh unto Jerusalem" (xi. 8).[1] By the use therefore of the same kind of argument as that which the critics employ with reference to the statement about Nineveh, it would be possible to prove that Jerusalem both was, and was not destroyed, when the fourth Gospel was written!

Further, the presence of certain alleged Aramaisms in the narrative is referred to as evidence of a late date. Not more than eight of these Aramaic or Syriac words are worthy of serious consideration. Cheyne's microscopic analysis detected ten; Driver, however, cites only six; in a recent volume written from the critical standpoint, only four are mentioned.[2] With respect to all it must be remembered that Jonah lived on the very border of Syria: that there had certainly been before his time a century of close political and commercial contact between Israel and the Aramæans of Damascus; and therefore the Aramaisms, if such they are, might be regarded as evidence of a North Palestinian origin. But eminent Hebraists deny that those cited are

[1] *Cambridge Bible*: p. 40. [2] Lanchester: *Ibid*, p. 41.

indisputably Aramaic. Even if it were proved that they were, such kind of evidence is, experience testifies, extremely precarious. Not very long ago, for example, the occurrence of the names of a few Greek musical instruments in the narrative was regarded as positive proof of the late date of Daniel. That opinion was based upon the erroneous assumption that the Jew did not come into contact with Greek civilization until after the Macedonian conquests. No self-respecting scholar could reason on that assumption to-day. Professor Flinders Petrie, the eminent Egyptologist, and others have shown how unwarrantable it is in the light of the discoveries of the existence of a Hebrew community in Upper Egypt, at Elephantine in the fifth century B.C., some of whom had probably migrated to Egypt in the days of the prophet Jeremiah, and the additional find of traces of Greek colonies on the coast of Palestine in the time of Hezekiah, a century before Daniel was born.[1] A mustard seed of archæological fact removes a mountain of critical theory.

Even if it could be proved that the whole of the words cited were undoubtedly Aramaic, that could not be accepted as certain evidence of a late date, in the face of the following weighty

[1] See Sayce: *Higher Criticism and the Monuments*, p. 494.

testimony of Professor R. D. Wilson, of Princeton, one of the most distinguished philologists of our time: "That Aramaic words may have been in Hebrew documents, at any time from Moses to Ezra, is shown by the fact that two or more words and phrases found elsewhere only in Aramaic occur already in the Tel-el-Amarna letters, and one in a letter to the king of Egypt from Abd-Hiba of Jerusalem." And again: "David conquered Damascus and other cities where Aramaic was spoken, and the Israelites have certainly been in continuous contact with Aramaean tribes from that time to the present. Sporadic cases of the use of Aramaic words would, therefore, prove nothing as to the date of a Hebrew document." [1]

There is actually only one word in the entire narrative of Jonah that can be regarded, with absolute certainty, as non-Hebraic. That is the word *taam*, the Assyrian for "decree." But that fact may be regarded as evidence in support of the belief that Jonah himself was the author; that he went to Nineveh, and there heard the exact term used for the royal proclamation.[2]

[1] *Is the Higher Criticism Scholarly?* pp. 23 and 31.

[2] How uncertain is the linguistic evidence upon which the critics rely is revealed by the admissions which they themselves make. E.g. (i) סְפִינָה (*ship*), says G. A. Smith (p. 497), "is not elsewhere found in O.T., but is common in later

"We have no certain indications to fix its precise date" is the admission of Professor Peake. The following represents the great diversity of opinion among various eminent Hebraists. Pusey assigns it to Jonah's lifetime or early in the eighth century B.C.; Kleinert to the exile or seventh century; Ewald to the sixth or fifth; Driver to the fifth; Orelli to the fourth; Vatke to the third; while Hitzig brings it down to the Maccabean period, or the second century, which verily is a *reductio ad absurdum*. Bewer points to the post-exilic period, somewhere between 400

Hebrew and Aramaic." But Bewer (p. 12) says that the word "means here evidently *the lower deck*, and is derived from the good Hebrew root סִפֵּן." (ii) מַלָּח (*Seaman*) is a purely technical term the absence of which from earlier Hebrew may be due simply to the fact, as Bewer points out, that "the O.T. has so few sea-stories." (iii) The use of שׁ the abbreviated form of the relative אֲשֶׁר is frequently cited as evidence of a late date; but Lanchester (p. 47) admits that "it is found in the sections of the Books of Kings which deal with the lives of Elijah and Elisha and are held to exhibit peculiarities of the North Palestinian style." (iv) רִבּוֹ instead of רִבָּבָה (*ten thousand*) and מִנָּה (*prepare*) cannot surely be alleged as proof of a late date, for both occur in Psalms of David (lxi. 8 and lxviii. 18). Cheyne says that "the diction of Jonah is purer than that of Esther, Chronicles and Daniel"; Driver admits that some of the linguistic features might be consistent with a pre-exilic origin in Northern Israel; Bewer says concerning the Psalm in chapter ii: "the Heb. is pure and no Aram. influence is apparent"; and the conclusion cannot be resisted that the linguistic characteristics of the book as a whole tell strongly in favour of a North Palestinian origin, and, correspondingly, of the authorship of Jonah himself.

and 200 B.C., and adds, "and this is as much as we can say." There is, thus, a superabundance of opinion. The only safe conclusion, which the plain man can arrive at, is that there is no certain evidence which can dispose of the statement of Pusey, who was the Oxford Regius Professor of Hebrew: "The history of his mission, Jonah doubtless himself wrote. . . . The style of the book is, in fact, pure and simple Hebrew, corresponding to the simplicity of the narrative and of the prophet's character." [1] And that opinion is confirmed by the expert testimony of Professor R. D. Wilson, who says: "There is not in them (Jonah, Joel, etc.) one certainly Persian word nor a single Greek word. . . . In language, style and thought, no greater contrast can be found in the whole literature of the Old Testament than there is between the books that purport to have been written and those which the critics allege to have been written in this period." [2]

Finally, some scholars have, following the suggestion of Budde, tried to treat the book as a midrash on 2 Kings xiv. 25, i.e., a fictional expansion of the historic statement contained in the passage cited. Cheyne, on the contrary, professes to find the source of what he regards as the Jonah

[1] *Minor Prophets*, V. pp. 6 and 22. [2] *Ibid*, p. 56.

legend in the "original myth" contained in Jeremiah li. 34: "Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon hath devoured me, he hath crushed me, he hath made me an empty vessel, he hath swallowed me as a dragon, he hath filled his maw with my delicates; he hath cast me out." Respecting such fanciful notions, let critic answer critic. Says Mr. Lanchester: "Such lines of investigation are ingenious and interesting but perhaps not very helpful. It is always dangerous to read elaborate subtleties into what purports to be a simple narrative." [1] That statement applies also to Dr. Trumbull's attempt to trace a parallelism between the history of Jonah and that of the divine monster, half man and half fish, from whom the Babylonians believed they had derived the elements of culture and civilization. The Babylonian legend, according to Berosus, was to the effect that in the first year of the world there appeared out of the Persian Gulf, a being endowed with reason whose name was Oannês. The body of the monster was that of a fish, with a second head which was that of a man, and the feet of a man issued from its tail. It had also a man's voice. This compound being passed its day among men as an instructor in the first principles of every art,

[1] *Ibid*, p. 45.

the sciences and letters. At sunset it descended into the sea and spent the night among the waves!

As, surely, a last resort, some scholars have endeavoured to dispose altogether of the historicity of the book by presuming to treat the Scriptural narrative as a Jewish adaptation of the classical myth of Perseus and Andromeda. It is an impossible theory which has been completely refuted by Pusey and others. But it serves as an example of the extremity to which certain critics have been reduced in their strenuous attempts to evade the plain interpretation of the Bible history. "Let us not grovel for the beetles and the earthworms of almost forgotten faiths which may perchance be discovered beneath the stones and sod of the Old Testament, while the violets and the lilies-of-the-valley of a sweet and lowly faith are in bloom on every page, and every oracle revealed within the Word of God is jubilant with songs of everlasting joy. The true religion of Israel came down from God arrayed in the beautiful garments of righteousness and life. We cannot substitute for this heaven-made apparel a robe of human manufacture, however fine it be." [1]

[1] R. D. Wilson, *Ibid.* pp. 61-2.

(vii.) The consistency of the narrative is maintained, its harmony becomes manifest, and the revelation it mediates grows more luminous, when its historical character has been clearly apprehended.

Negative criticism is comparatively easy; but it is frequently attended by perplexing results. If the historicity of Jonah be rejected it may seem, at the first glance, that many problems are disposed of; but, in fact, more serious ones arise. Moreover, no clear and consistent principle of interpretation seems discernible. All that is possible is to select one out of a collection of hypotheses, some of which are mutually destructive. To leave the highway of belief in its historical character is to be compelled to wander in a labyrinth of bye-paths and tortuous windings, which perplex and weary, but seldom lead to the apprehension of the truth which the book enshrines. The critical theory, moreover, makes a big demand upon our credulity. Why, e.g., the name of Jonah was so freely made use of, if it be only allegory, parable, or fiction, no one can

surmise. How the book came to be universally regarded as historical is a mystery. Why it was written, or when, can be only vaguely guessed. Bohme, in 1887, propounded the monstrous theory that the work was the product of two authors and two redactors, making a total of four distinct persons jointly responsible for the production of a narrative, which, rightly interpreted, manifests a striking unity.

Ewald suggests that it is a legend about the prophet which some unknown writer worked up into a narrative "simply as pliable material for the elaboration of his own principles." Dr. Peake, in his *Commentary*, says that the author is not using a prophetic legend to convey his moral; that the story is purely imaginative; that he had to place his story in the pre-exilic period; and that "if he wished to attach his book to the name of a historic character, Jonah served his purpose perhaps as well as anyone." The critical theory, again, cannot rid itself of glaring inconsistency. Prof. G. A. Smith, e.g., on one page of his commentary vividly describes "the sudden wind sweeping down from *the very hills on which Jonah believed he had left his God*." [1] On the next page he translates Jonah's declara-

[1] The italics are mine.

tion as follows : " A Hebrew am I, and a worshipper of the God of Heaven who made the sea and the dry land. And the men feared greatly, and said to him, what is this thou hast done ? (for they knew he was fleeing from the face of Jehovah, because he had told them)." [1]

Most modern critics affirm that chapter two is out of place ; but why the psalm was inserted where it is they can only guess. Driver tries to dispose of the difficulty, in the arbitrary fashion common to modern criticism, thus : " Hence no doubt the book of Jonah was not its original place ; but it was taken by the author from some prior source." [2] Cheyne affirms, however, that it was not the author but some later hand that introduced the psalm. Neither can provide evidence in support of their statements. Further, to accord with the critical theory, the testimony of Jesus Christ must be regarded either as an interpolation, or His words do not mean what they imply, or, if they do, then He was either accommodating Himself to the ignorance of His hearers or He Himself was mistaken !

The Book of Jonah is an allegory Divinely inspired, which the Divine Lord Incarnate mistook for history ! The modern critical theory, as held

[1] *Ibid.* pp. 518-9 [2] *Introduction to Lit. of O.T.*, p. 325.

by many, might thus be summarised. But is it credible that the Man of Nazareth, Who lived for thirty years within an hour's walk of Jonah's home, and the traditional site of Jonah's tomb; Who doubtless resorted thither from time to time, meditating upon the unique experience of His typical forerunner, a prophet also of Galilee, was, apart altogether from His Divine knowledge and insight, so completely mistaken as some critics try to persuade us?

The persistent peril of the inconsistency which attaches to modern criticism is the product of its irresponsibility. Any weapon apparently may be employed so long as it is destructive of the traditional position; though the result often is confusion. And all this labour because of the determined endeavour to get rid of the supernatural element in a Divine revelation! Why should we reject the testimony of the ages and that of the Divine Lord of the ages, when in so doing we land ourselves in a quagmire of inconsistency and perplexity, simply because of the presence of the supernatural? The problems of unbelief often outweigh those of simple faith. After all, as Dr. Robertson Nicoll quoted, in reference to the crowning miracle of Christ's resurrection from the dead, and the tendency on

the part of unbelievers to take refuge in the general assertion of the impossibility of the supernatural: "It is better to believe in the supernatural than to believe in the ridiculous, and that is what it comes to." [1]

If, on the other hand, the historical view be accepted, the book is demonstrably a perfect unity; the entire narrative is consistent; no displacement, rearrangement or emendation is necessary; and a remarkable harmony is discernible, not only within the book itself, but also between it and the New Testament references; providing an illuminating example of that blending of the Old and the New in the Biblical revelation which is the sure credential of the Divine inspiration of the Holy Scripture. To demonstrate that fact will be my endeavour in the chapters which follow.

[1] *The Church's One Foundation*, p. 150.

"The prophet knew, through the inward suggestion of the Holy Spirit, that the repentance of the Gentiles would be the ruin of the Jews. Therefore, as a lover of his country, he was not so much displeased at the thought of Nineveh's salvation, as he was averse to the destruction of his own people."

(Jerome.)

Chapter III

THE PIVOT OF THE PROBLEM: WHY DID JONAH FLEE TO TARSHISH?

The book opens with the arresting statement, "Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." Why did Jonah flee? Upon the answer the true interpretation of the narrative depends. The character of Jonah has been maligned. He is commonly regarded as one who was disobedient to the heavenly vision through cowardice. On the contrary, he becomes, when the story of his mission is rightly understood, one of the heroes of the Bible. A disobedient prophet, at the first, he certainly was; but the motive of his disobedience was a patriotism so intense, and a self-abnegation so heroic, that there

is perhaps more in his character to admire than to condemn. This branch of the subject demands careful investigation. Many false notions are traceable to misunderstanding of the prophet's motive. It is therefore necessary to determine definitely what the motive was. And, happily, we are not left to wander in a maze of probability. The book itself gives us the clue. As so often happens in the devout study of the Bible, the key to the solution of the problem is found embedded in the Scripture itself. Let us then first decide what was *not* the motive of the prophet's flight.

(i.) The flight of Jonah was not occasioned by the fear that he would be hanged, decapitated, or impaled, for his temerity in pronouncing the doom of the guilty city. Such a view widely prevails. But there is not a phrase in the book to suggest that fear for his own safety ever stirred the mind of the prophet. On the contrary, so little regard had he for his own preservation, that it is recorded that he it was who suggested to the heathen sailors that his presence on the ship was the occasion of the tempest, and that if he were cast overboard, the storm would cease.[1] The Hebrew prophets were built in the heroic

[1] i. 12

mould. The fear of God was so wrought in them that the fear of man was cast out of them. The fire of the prophetic inspiration created a zeal and a jealousy for the honour of Jehovah that left little room for personal consideration. The spirit of Elijah was not absent from Elisha, nor from Jonah, the third in the succession of the prophets of Northern Israel. It was not cowardice that made Jonah refuse to go to Nineveh. The reason of his disobedience had a radically different origin.

(ii.) The flight of the prophet was not due to the prompting of a spirit of religious exclusiveness. It is frequently argued that Jonah, like the Jewish opponents of St. Paul, was jealous lest the privileges which belonged to Israel as the children of Abraham should be extended to the Gentiles. That such a prejudice was altogether absent from his mind I do not urge; but that it was the principal or compelling motive I strongly disbelieve. No material evidence for such a presumption can be found within the book itself. It is a theory which is too readily employed when no other is discernible. But, as will presently appear, it conflicts with the plain statement of the prophet. Jonah's attitude to the heathen sailors is governed by a spirit of compassion.

While he recognizes the gulf that separates him from them as idol-worshippers, by reason of his knowledge of Jehovah the Lord Omnipotent, he realises that they are innocent; that he himself is the guilty one, and he is unwilling that they should perish because of his sin. Elisha, who was Jonah's immediate predecessor, did not betray a spirit of exclusiveness in his treatment of the leprous Naaman the Syrian, but rather a spirit of compassion and readiness to extend to the earnest suppliant the healing grace of the Lord. There is no ground for the suggestion that Jonah refused to go to Nineveh because he was a religious monopolist. For it is manifest that he was not commissioned to proclaim a gospel; he was not sent to be a light to illumine the heathen darkness; he was sent only to be a messenger of judgment.

(iii.) It has been declared, further, that the reason of his disobedience was personal jealousy. Mr. Lanchester, e.g., following Ewald, says: "Jonah is represented as a selfish man, jealous for his own reputation. . . . His preaching had created such an impression, that from entirely selfish motives he dreads the reaction."[1] These statements imply that Jonah had won esteem

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 67.

in the court of Jeroboam II as the seer who had predicted the extension of the borders of the kingdom; but, that when the command reached him to go to Nineveh and pronounce its doom, he foresaw that the threatened judgment would not take place, and therefore his fame as a prophet would suffer. Jonah is thus likened to a modern preacher who courts popularity at the cost of fidelity! Nothing in the narrative can be cited of a certainty to support this supposition. It is hardly credible that the prophet who is described in the first chapter as being concerned for the preservation of the lives of the heathen mariners on the ship, can be represented in the last chapter as angrily petulant, simply because, owing to the preservation of a city with its multitudes of innocent children, his professional reputation has been jeopardized. Some stronger motive, surely, was at work in Jonah's heart.

(iv.) If the flight of the prophet cannot be accounted for by the supposition that he was a coward; nor by the suggestion that he was a religious monopolist; nor by the theory that he was actuated by jealousy for his prophetic reputation; what reason, then, are we to assign for so signal an act of disobedience? The answer is, I believe, indicated within the

narrative. It needs only that we visualize the historic background in order to appreciate it fully. Jonah's refusal sprang from a two-fold dread. As a patriot, he was full of fear of the ruthless ferocity of the Assyrians as the world-power destined to destroy Israel. As a prophet, he was acquainted with the ways of Jehovah. Therefore he was fearful of the tenderness in the heart of God, who, he reasoned, might spare Nineveh should the Ninevites repent after hearing the proclamation of their doom. And, for Israel's sake, Jonah resolves that Nineveh shall have no chance of repentance.

This matter is of such importance, as providing the clue to the interpretation of the narrative, that we must examine it closely and give it the emphasis which is due. For some years prior to the appearance of Jonah, as described in the fourteenth chapter of 2 Kings, Assyria had been the dominant world-power. Nineveh, the capital, and the metropolis of the world, is described in the book as "a great and wicked city." The wickedness of Nineveh was of long continuance; and its evil report universal. Nahum, the prophet of Judah, writing close upon the time of Nineveh's destruction, says, "Where is the den of the lions, and the feeding place of the young lions, where

the lion and the lioness walked, the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid? The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lioness, and filled his caves with prey and his dens with ravin." [1] Beast-like ferocity characterized Assyria's treatment of subject nations and peoples. So he continues: "Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and rapine"; [2] And he concludes his prophecy with a graphic description of the universal rejoicing that shall attend the report of the overthrow of the wicked and cruel city: "All that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee; for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?" [3]

This description by the Hebrew prophet is confirmed and illustrated by the vivid representations of the monuments. The Assyrians were the Huns of ancient days. Unlike the Babylonians they were not an agricultural people. They were essentially a military power, and lived on the spoils of conquest. Their ruthlessness in victory they themselves gloried in. Assyrian monarchs, instead of concealing it, took pains to exhibit their inhuman treatment of vanquished foes, in order that their own and future generations might

[1] ii. 11, 12. [2] iii. 1. [3] iii. 19.

be impressed. A bas-relief in the British Museum represents Tiglath Pileser III standing proudly with one foot on the neck of a prostrate foe as he receives the submission of the enemy. The highly-figured bronze gates which adorned the entrances, and the sculptured alabaster slabs which panelled the walls of their royal palaces, have come down to us as an unfading reminder of "man's inhumanity to man," which the Assyrians so grossly exemplified. "The barbarities," says Professor Sayce, "which followed the capture of a town would be almost incredible, were they not a subject of boast in the inscriptions which record them. Assurnatsir-pal's cruelties were especially revolting. Pyramids of human heads marked the path of the conqueror; boys and girls were burnt alive or reserved for a worse fate; men were impaled, flayed alive, blinded, or deprived of their hands and feet, of their ears and noses, while the women and children were carried into slavery, the captured city plundered and reduced to ashes, and the trees in its neighbourhood cut down. During the second Assyrian Empire warfare was a little more humane, but the most horrible tortures were still exercised upon the vanquished. How deeply seated was

the thirst for blood and vengeance on an enemy is exemplified in a bas-relief which represents Assur-bani-pal and his queen feasting in their garden while the head of the conquered Elamite king hangs from a tree above.[1]

It was to a nation with such a character and history that the son of Amittai was commissioned to convey the message of doom. Of the blood-thirstiness and ruthlessness of the Ninevites he could not be ignorant; for his home was in a border town. Very probably he had been already a witness of Assyrian barbarity in several small raids across the frontier. And he can read the signs of the times. If one may venture a modern parallel, it would not be inexact to say that what Belgium was to Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century, that Israel was to Assyria in the eighth century B.C. Hosea, a contemporary prophet, had prophesied that Israel would eat unclean things in Assyria. Jonah therefore knows that Northern Israel is in peril of devastation because of its apostasy; he is not unaware of the instrument that is to accomplish it; he foresees that the Assyrian wolf is destined to come down upon the fold to devour and scatter the sheep.

[1] *Assyria: Its Princes, Priests and People*, p. 127.

And he realises that the time of accomplishment is near.[1]

It was in that dark and fateful hour that the word of the Lord came to Jonah saying: "Arise go to Nineveh that great city and cry against it and say, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown' for their wickedness is come up before me." The prophet, at the first, must have rejoiced greatly at the news that Nineveh was doomed. For if Nineveh were destroyed Israel might be saved. But as Jonah meditated upon the tremendous event, the occurrence of which had been Divinely predicted, and the part assigned to him as the herald of Assyrian overthrow, it began to dawn upon him that there was a possibility, yea a probability that the message of warning might prove to be a message of mercy; that, should Nineveh repent, Jehovah might

[1] It was in 738 B.C. that the Assyrians first invaded Northern Israel. In 722 B.C. Samaria the capital was taken; and the leading inhabitants were, by order of Sargon, exiled to Mesopotamia and Media, and their places filled by aliens from the plain of the Euphrates, from whom the Samaritans of later times were descended (2 Kings xvii. 6). But long before Samaria was captured Jonah's own home territory was devastated, and its inhabitants carried into captivity. For it is recorded that "in the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser King of Assyria and took," among other places, "Galilee, all the land of Naphtali and carried them captive to Assyria," (2 Kings xv. 29). Thus within fifty years of his lifetime what Jonah dreaded actually came to pass.

repent and Nineveh be spared! What then must he do? Shall he run the risk? Shall he go to Nineveh and tell the inhabitants thereof that within forty days their city is to be destroyed? He dare not. He is afraid of the Divine compassion. He dreads the tenderness in the heart of God. He is terrified at the possibility of a manifestation of the Divine mercy. So he resolves to disobey. Because he is so pure a patriot he refuses to be any longer a prophet. For Israel's sake he will not give the Ninevites the message of warning, fearing the loving-kindness of the Lord. "Was not this my saying," he expostulates, after Nineveh had been spared, "when I was yet in my country. Therefore I hasted to flee unto Tarshish; for I knew that Thou art a gracious God and full of compassion, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and repentest Thee of the evil." [1] That was why Jonah refused to go.

Now that decision was an appalling one for a Hebrew prophet to make. "He went out from the presence of the Lord." That solemnly significant statement is thrice repeated in the first ten verses of the book. The phrase does not imply that Jonah believed Jehovah to be merely a

[1] iv. 2.

tribal or local deity, and that to sail West to Tarshish would be to depart out of the sphere of His jurisdiction. Such criticism, surely, is unwarranted in view of the explicit statement recorded in the ninth verse: "I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land." The sublime revelation of the character of God with which the book closes is a further witness. Jonah's conception of the nature and power of Jehovah was more like to that of the Psalmist who cried: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me." [1] To go out "from the presence of the Lord" is to be interpreted in the light of the frequent prophetic expression, "The Lord before whom I stand." It signified that Jonah renounced his commission; that he resigned his orders; that he resolved to cast off his prophetic mantle. No longer will he enjoy the dignity of standing in God's presence as an obedient messenger, saying, "Speak Lord for Thy servant heareth;" and then going forth to the people with the message

[1] Psalm cxxxix. 7, 9, 10.

with which he has been inspired, proclaiming "Thus saith the Lord!"

That decision, the prophet knew, was one which would bring in its train dreadful consequences. To be wilfully disobedient to the command of the Lord of Hosts was to incur the penalty of the Divine displeasure. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." When Jonah wilfully disobeyed, he went out with the consciousness that he was a lost soul. "I am cast out from before Thine eyes." But his patriotism was so intense that he willingly made the sacrifice. "Who dies if England lives? Who lives if England dies?" Great reason have we had in our national history to recognize the sublime spirit of self-sacrifice enshrined in those words. With a patriotism no less deep, and a flaming consciousness of all that the preservation of the elect nation meant for the fulfilment of the Divine promises made to the fathers, Jonah in his heart, in the crisis of his renunciation, might have said: "Who dies if Israel lives? Who lives if Israel dies? What matter if I perish? Let me be damned if only Israel be saved!" By that decision, as heroic as it was mistaken, Jonah joined the company of the noblest of the martyrs, who, like Moses and Paul, would choose even to

be spiritually accursed for their nation's sake. How amazing is the self-abnegation of Moses, who, after the apostasy of the Israelites in the plain of Sinai, when the chosen people gave themselves over to the idolatrous worship of the golden calf, thus addressed them: "Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin!" [1] Having ascended the holy mount, he pathetically pleads with the Lord, offering himself as a ransom: "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now if Thou wilt forgive their sin; and, if not, blot me I pray Thee out of thy book which Thou hast written." St. Paul, likewise, notwithstanding the bitterness of the manifold persecutions which he endured at the hands of the unbelieving Jews, confesses that his heart bleeds for his nation, and in a spirit of ineffably generous impulse, makes in his epistle to the Romans the solemn asseveration: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according

[1] Exod. xxxii. 30.

to the flesh." [1] The spirit which animated Moses and Paul was the same spirit of intense Hebrew patriotism which fired the heart of Jonah when he made the great refusal. He went out from the presence of the Lord, believing that by his disobedience he had become accursed; but it was for Israel's sake. He will not go to Nineveh; he will not give the Ninevites a chance of repentance; because he dreads both the military might of the Assyrians and the tenderness in the heart of God. There, I submit, is the clue to the interpretation of the entire narrative. Many theories have been propounded to solve the problem. Most are unsatisfying. The key which fits the lock is supplied in the prophet's expostulatory utterance, which, for the sake of emphasis, is here repeated: "I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I hasted to flee unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repentest thee of the evil." [2]

[1] Rom. ix. 1–3. [2] iv. 2.

"I hold it for a most infallible rule in expositions of sacred Scripture, that where a literal construction will stand, the farthest from the letter is commonly the worst."

—(Hooker).

Chapter IV

THE NARRATIVE HISTORICALLY PRESENTED

In the examination of the book in detail, the principal aim will be to exhibit the consistency of the narrative, viewed in the light of the clue to its interpretation which has been suggested. The treatment, therefore, will be brief, so that the flow of the narrative may be uninterrupted so far as is possible. For that reason, some questions of great importance will be examined in a subsequent chapter with a greater degree of fulness than is desirable in this. The analysis of the book into four principal divisions, corresponding to the four chapters in our English version,[1] may be described as follows: (i) The Divine Commission and the Prophet's Disobedience, resulting in his flight, submergence, and preservation; (ii) Jonah's Prayer of Thanks-

[1] i. 17 is, in the Hebrew, the first verse of chapter ii.

giving, Penitence and Consecration; (iii) The Divine Commission renewed and the Prophet's Obedience, resulting in the repentance of the Ninevites and the manifested mercy of Jehovah; (iv) The Colloquy and Contrast between Jonah and Jehovah, with the marvellous revelation of the tenderness of the Divine character therein exhibited.

(i.) The Divine Commission and the Prophet's Disobedience. Chapter I.

The first chapter, which contains the vivid story of Jonah's refusal and the awful experience which ensued, may be thus summarised: (i) The Commission; (ii) The Flight; (iii) The Tempest; (iv) The Detection; (v) The Submergence; (vi) The Preservation.

(i) *The Commission.* (1–2). "Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai saying, Arise, go to Nineveh that great city and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me." The moral corruption of the great metropolis has reached its limit. Rising up before

the eyes of the All-seeing, it has provoked the Divine wrath. Jonah, the prophetic messenger, is summoned and charged to go to Nineveh and pronounce its doom. No longer can its wantonness and wickedness be overlooked.

(ii) *The Flight.* (1–3). "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." Three times in the first ten verses it is recorded that the prophet's flight was "from the presence of the Lord." That phrase means, as previously indicated, Jonah's renunciation of the prophetic office. He refuses to be any longer, in Augustine's words, the "*enunciator verborum dei hominibus.*" Instead of going East he takes great pains to go far West, paying the passage money in a ship sailing to Tartessus, a port on the coast of Spain.

(iii) *The Tempest.* (4–6). "But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea so that the ship was like to be broken." The Hebrew word translated "sent out" is a vigorous expression. It might be translated, as in the R.V. margin, "hurled." It is the same as that used to describe Saul's casting his spear at David. It vividly expresses Jehovah's sovereignty over the elements. The storm was evidently regarded by the ship's crew as extraordinary in character,

threatening destruction. Although of mixed nationality they were united by a common dread, and joined together in prayer, every man crying unto his god. Meanwhile they lightened the ship by the jettison of the cargo or part of the ship's tackle. But Jonah was fast asleep in an innermost cabin. Before he reached his critical decision he had doubtless spent many a troubled day and sleepless night. When he embarked he was worn and weary. "What meanest thou, O sleeper?" asks the captain indignantly. That was no time for slumber. "Arise call upon thy God," he implores, "if so be that God will think upon us that we perish not." But the storm continued.

(iv) *The Detection.* (7–10). In their peril and perplexity, realising that the tempest is of a preternatural character, and that their supplications have been unavailing, the crew begin to suspect that on board is someone who has incurred the Divine displeasure. "Come and let us cast lots," they say to one another, "that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us." And the lot fell upon Jonah. Then followed a conversation between those heathen sailors and the Hebrew prophet, which is reported with such graphic detail, that it bears upon its surface the impress of authen-

ticity. Eagerly do they question him : " Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us ; what is thine occupation ? and whence comest thou ? what is thy country ? and of what people art thou ? " In his reply we note particularly : Jonah's emphatic assertion that he is a worshipper not of any local deity, like the heathen idolaters, but of Jehovah, " the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land " ; his confession that he has renounced his prophetic commission, saying what terrified them exceedingly, that " he fled from the presence of the Lord " ; and that although he makes a full confession to the mariners, he makes no confession to his Lord. He knows that he is disobedient, but he persists in his disobedience because he believes that only thereby can Israel be saved. His whole communication, it is evident, created such fear and consternation in their hearts, that the heathen sailors sought every means of preserving his life, instead of immediately ridding themselves of his presence ; for in their eyes his person was as sacred as his testimony was true.

(v) *The Submergence.* (11–16). But the storm continues, and the outlook becomes more terrifying. The crew have taken to their oars, and strain every nerve to bring the ship to the shore.

All their efforts, however, prove unavailing. Twice it is recorded, to give the force of the Hebrew idiom, that the sea became increasingly tempestuous. In the extremity of their desperation they are at last compelled, most unwillingly, to cast overboard the Hebrew passenger who has so freely confessed his guilt. But, dreading the possible consequences of what they are about to do, they pray for pardon: "We beseech thee O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou O Lord hast done as it pleased thee." Jonah, meanwhile, offers no resistance; he willingly co-operates; while they hesitate he almost urges them to the committal of the deed. Why is he so eager for destruction? Why does he almost plead to be drowned? There is only one satisfying answer. He realises that he is a lost soul, having disobeyed the voice of the Lord and deliberately gone out from His Presence. Drowning, therefore, has no terrors for him. Besides, to perish in the sea will but make more assured the non-fulfilment of the Divine command. The prophet's only dread is to be compelled to go and preach in Nineveh the message of warning that may prove a message of mercy. He, therefore, deliberately chooses his own destruction

rather than be an instrument of the preservation of Assyria's capital. So, finally, we read that the mariners took up Jonah, unresistingly on his part, reluctantly on theirs, "and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging."

(vi) *The Preservation.* (17). But instead of sinking and dying, Jonah is gripped and held by the hand of God. The instrument employed is a submarine animal which has been Divinely prepared or appointed to receive him. The particular nature of the creature that swallowed the prophet no one knows. Unnecessary difficulties have been created by the unfortunate use of the term "whale" in the Authorized Version of the New Testament references to the narrative. Let it suffice to say here that the term "whale" is nowhere found in the original. In the O.T. the creature is described as "a great fish"; in the N.T., as a "sea-monster." The supremely important point to note, however, is that the swallowing of the prophet was not an act of punishment but a means of preservation. Jonah is trying to get away from God and the performance of His Will. He even chooses to be drowned as a way of escape. When he was cast overboard he expected to perish; but God willed that he should be preserved for the carrying out of the Divine

commission, the performance of which he has hitherto so violently resisted. So it is recorded: "the Lord prepared [1] a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

(ii.) Jonah's Prayer: A Song of Thanksgiving, A Cry of Penitence, A Vow of Consecration. Chapter II.

There have been objectors who have not hesitated to pour ridicule upon this Bible narrative because it is recorded, they affirm, that Jonah composed a psalm while incarcerated in the belly of the whale. Others appear to stumble over the fact of the resemblance traceable between the utterance of Jonah, as recorded, and the language of Davidic and other psalms. Now it might be said that here we have an instance of one line of criticism which very materially disposes of the other. But a careful study of the precise language of the prayer reveals the fact

[1] The Hebrew word translated "prepared" does not mean to create, but to appoint.

of its naturalness, its appropriateness, and especially its consistency, with the entire narrative, viewed from the historical standpoint which is here presented. As to the correspondence in thought and expression with passages in the Book of Psalms, Bishop Perowne has aptly said: "The words of the Psalter, however, are not exactly and literally quoted, but its ideas and phrases are freely wrought into the prayer, as if drawn from the well-stored memory of a pious Israelite, familiar with its contents, and naturally giving vent to his feelings in the cherished forms, which were now instinct for him with new life and meaning." [1] It is surely unwarrantable criticism to suspect the authenticity of a prayer of one of God's servants because it contains some resemblance to the language of another, whether he lived before or after. That prayer will be saturated with the water of the Word should be a normal expectation. One of the ways by which the Spirit helpeth our infirmity—"for we know not what we should pray for as we ought" [2]—is to mould the language of Scripture to meet the need of the suppliant and make it articulate. A personal experience may be cited.

Amid many pathetic and inspiring memories of

[1] *Cambridge Bible*, p. 35. [2] Rom. viii, 26.

the war, the writer gratefully recalls a little prayer room in a convalescent camp behind the Somme, where the presence of God was powerfully manifest. In that room, about a dozen men used to meet for prayer daily, before going up the line. Not a few of them had been worldly-minded in their outlook, blasphemous in speech and immoral in conduct. But they had been arrested by the Gospel of the pardoning and renewing grace of God. All had begun to read the New Testament, especially the daily portions. When they, in turns, began to pray, it was a revelation to hear how their petitions so appropriately, and often so beautifully, blended with Divine precepts and promises. Then was evidenced how much God the Holy Spirit could do in the work of illumination in a comparatively brief period of time; and, as a result, how those hitherto unaccustomed to pray could be inspired through the ministry of the Word imprinted on their hearts. That Mary the Mother of our Lord should, in her thanksgiving, incorporate the language of Hannah's song of praise, which she knew so intimately; that Jonah, in the crisis of his realisation that he was held in the deep by the hand of God, should in his thanksgiving, make use of the language of psalms of praise for deliverance from the pit,—

all this is most natural and what we should expect. There is no insuperable difficulty here. On the contrary, what is recorded is in complete harmony with the historicity of the narrative.

Let us now examine the prayer in detail. It is introduced by the words: "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly." It should be carefully observed that Jonah's utterance was not primarily or principally a prayer of petition. The word translated "prayed" is a comprehensive term. It connotes praise quite as much as petition. The introduction is paralleled by the story of Hannah's thanksgiving in 1 Sam. ii. 1–10, where the same word for "prayed" is used, and which begins: "And Hannah prayed and said, My heart exulteth in the Lord." Neither in Hannah's prayer nor in that of Jonah can one petition be found. Both are songs of thanksgiving for mercies already received. Jonah's utterance, then, was not, as many suppose, a cry for deliverance. Already he is conscious that underneath him are the everlasting arms of God's preserving grace. "He asks for nothing, he only thanks. But that for which he thanks is the deliverance from the perils of the *sea*. The thanksgiving corresponds with the plain words, that he *prayed out of the fish's belly*. They are suited to one so

praying, who looked on in full faith to the future completion of his deliverance, although *our* minds might rather have been fixed on the actual peril. It is a thanksgiving of faith, but of stronger faith than many moderns have been able to conceive." [1] Jonah's prayer both begins and ends with a note of praise for the saving mercy of Jehovah. The entire utterance may be described as (i) A Song of Thanksgiving; (ii) A Cry of Penitence; (iii) A Vow of Consecration.

(i) *It is a Song of Thanksgiving.* The mercy of the Lord manifest in his miraculous preservation from drowning, notwithstanding his disobedience, is that for which Jonah lifts up his heart in thankful acknowledgment. For in that fact is the token that, though he had forsaken the Lord, the Lord had not forsaken him. In his extremity he had cried, and Jehovah had answered by stretching out His hand to save. So he begins, "I called out of my affliction unto the Lord and He answered me." He does not say "I call," but "I called"; he does not pray for the future but gives thanks for the past. Then he proceeds, "Out of the belly of Sheol" (or, as we might say, "out of the jaws of death") "cried I, and Thou heardest my voice" (2). And the words which follow seem

[1] Pusey, *op. cit.*, V. 26.

clearly to indicate that his thanksgiving was prompted by the realisation that God had gripped and preserved him from drowning through the instrumentality of the great fish. "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the deep was round about me; the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars closed upon me for ever; yet hast thou brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God" (5, 6).

(ii) *It is a Cry of Penitence.* As to the time when Jonah began to pray, I am inclined to agree with those who suggest that it was towards the close of the prophet's three days' entombment. The intervening period may have been in part a time of unconsciousness; but, of a certainty, it had been a season of realisation of the folly and futility of rebellion against the will of the Almighty. Like Saul on his mission to Damascus, Jonah had kicked against the pricks. But his appalling experience has led to a real conversion of heart and mind. Like the prodigal, destitute in the far country, he had come to himself. "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came in unto thee, into thy holy temple" (7). Reflection had revealed the depths of his folly. So he adds: "They that

regard lying vanities forsake their own mercy." Material idols of wood and stone are vanities; and so are a man's thoughts and purposes when divorced from God's revealed truth. Calvin interprets lying vanities as all inventions with which men deceive themselves.

Jonah's idol of the imagination, for the sake of which he had fled from the presence of Jehovah, was his perverted patriotism. His love of Israel had displaced his fear of Jehovah. For that he had become disobedient to the voice of the Lord. But now he realises how greatly he has erred. "They that regard lying vanities forsake their own mercy." The idolatry of self-will issues in departure from the living God. But all who like Jonah renounce God, "turning everyone to his own way," sooner or later learn how much they have missed in forsaking Him "whose property is always to have mercy."

(iii) *It is a Vow of Consecration.* "Make me as one of thy hired servants." In the experience of the Prodigal Son, repentance was followed by the resolve of self-surrender to the Father's will. Jonah, likewise, now sorrowful and submissive, is prepared to say, "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do." No longer will he rebel against the word of the Lord. The time has come for him to

rededicate himself as a prophet of Jehovah, to stand in His Presence, and to say humbly, "Speak Lord for thy servant heareth. I am ready to go whither thou shalt send me, to speak as Thou shalt instruct me." Such was Jonah's decision, as expressed in his words: "I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that which I have vowed" (9). When the point of complete self-surrender to Jehovah's will is reached, the time is ripe for his emancipation from his ocean prison-house, which has also been the means of his swift conveyance back to the land whence he had fled. Thus we read: "And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."

(iii.) The Divine Commission renewed and the Prophet's Obedience. Chapter III.

(i) *The Renewal of the Commission.* (1–3). "And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time saying, "Arise go unto Nineveh that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." Having been restored to the

prophetic office, Jonah is promptly given the work to do which formerly he has rejected. How significant are the words, "the second time." After the unique and awesome experience through which he has passed, the prophet recognizes that it is useless to rebel against the Divine will. His obedience is immediate. "So Jonah arose and went unto Nineveh according to the word of the Lord."

(ii) *The Preaching of the Prophet* (3–4). The story of the proclamation of the message is preceded by a reference to the magnitude of Nineveh as an indication, probably, of the seriousness and importance of the work committed to him. "Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey." Diodorus Siculus describes Nineveh as an irregular quadrangle of about sixty miles in circuit. Commander Jones, who made a trigonometrical survey of the district, says, "From Nineveh to Nimrud in round numbers is eighteen miles; thence to Khorsabad about twenty-eight, and back to Nineveh by the road fourteen miles." [1] The whole area of the Assyrian metropolis he computes as 350 square miles. The area of Greater London is said to be 315 square miles. Greater Nineveh could not have been

[1] *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XV. p. 315.

entirely covered by buildings, but must have included vast tracts of parks and pastures. The population was not less than 600,000, but not more than a million. "The conclusion to which recent discoveries lead is," says Keil, "that the name Nineveh, was used in two senses: first, for one particular city; and secondly, for a complex of four large primeval cities (including Nineveh proper), the circumvallation of which is still traceable, . . . the mounds of which cover the land." [1] To walk to the four principal points of the quadrangular city, Kouyunjik, Nimrud, Karamless and Khorsabad, would be to travel a total distance of sixty miles—a three days' journey. But, notwithstanding its vastness, the heart of Jonah did not quail. He traversed a portion of the city during one day, crying repeatedly the message of doom: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." It was a brief but terrifying proclamation. The word translated "overthrown" is the same as that used to describe the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.[2]

Four words, *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin,* struck terror into the heart of Belshazzar and his impious fellow-revellers, because they saw that behind the writing on the wall was the Power of the

[1] *Minor Prophets*, Vol. I, p. 390. [2] Gen. xix. 25, 29.

unseen Hand. The message of Jonah was terrifying, notwithstanding its brevity, because of the Divine credential which the speaker carried in his person.

(iii) *The Repentance of the Ninevites.* (5–9). One day's preaching sufficed to bring the Ninevites to their knees. Their penitence was immediate, deep, widespread, and strikingly manifest. "And the people of Nineveh," we read, "believed God," whose mouthpiece they recognised in Jonah. The outward signs of repentance were immediately forthcoming. They proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. Presently the news penetrates within the palace walls, and the king himself, without directly hearing the Divine messenger, joins in the act of public confession and humiliation. For he, we read, "arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him and covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes." Further, he ordered that all his subjects within the city should participate in the public lamentation, commanding that even the beasts of burden and the flocks and herds in the pastures should be included in the national mourning; for he made proclamation, and published through Nineveh a decree saying, "Let neither man nor beast,

herd nor flock taste anything, let them not feed nor drink water, but let them be covered with sackcloth both man and beast, and let them cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knoweth whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"

It is an amazing phenomenon that is here described. A religious awakening, of so great a magnitude, within so brief a period, is almost without parallel. Such an occurrence can only be accounted for by the explanation provided by Jesus Christ Himself when He said, "Jonah was a *sign* to the Ninevites." What is implied in that statement of our Lord I shall more fully discuss in a subsequent chapter. Let it suffice to say here, that the news of the prophet's amazing experience had preceded his arrival in Nineveh, and prepared the people for the warning that he brought. His very appearance confirmed the report. There is then no room for doubting that he is a man sent from God. His message is believed; terror prevails; mourning is universally manifest.

(iv) *The Repentance of Jehovah* (10). "And God saw their works, that they turned from their

evil way; and God repented of the evil which He said He would do unto them; and He did it not." This is a statement as to the Divine action, described from the human standpoint. "With God is no variableness neither shadow of turning." That statement in the Epistle of St. James is true with respect to God's providence and unfailing love. But throughout the whole realm of Holy Scripture we are taught that whensoever man repents, God repents. Human penitence transforms Divine purpose. The Assyrian king had conquered many enemies by his valour; he conquered God by his humility. For God's compassions fail not. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." [1]

(iv.) Jonah and Jehovah: Colloquy and Contrast. Chapter IV.

(i) *The Anger of Jonah and the Patience of Jehovah* (1–4). "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." His annoyance

[1] Ezek. xxxiii. 11

is occasioned by the conviction that his worst fears have been realised; that the future oppressors of his own people, instead of being destroyed, as he had hoped, have become the subjects of the Divine clemency. It has been suggested that Jonah's indignation sprang from wounded vanity, through the realisation that what he had predicted had failed to come to pass. I cannot discern any foundation for such a supposition. Jonah's grief is not due to wounded pride, but to offended patriotism. His chagrin vents itself in bitter expostulation. As one of us might say to a friend who has regretfully acted contrary to counsel given, "I told you so!" Jonah is represented as praying complainingly: "O Lord was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I hasted to flee unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, and repentest thee of the evil." His disappointment is so profound, his despair so unrelieved, that, like Elijah under the juniper tree, he asks that he may die. Life has lost all interest for him. The future is dark and foreboding, now that Israel's cruel and relentless foe has been spared. "Therefore now, O Lord," he says, "take, I beseech Thee, my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to

live." The only response he receives is the gentle reproof, " Doest thou well to be angry ? " There is anger that is justifiable. We may be angry and sin not. But there is anger that is unjustifiable. Hence the question, which may be rendered, "Art thou justly angry ? " There is a profound reason for the Divine action. Jonah must not judge hastily. The angry prophet is bidden to wait awhile and consider. The tenderness in the heart of God is manifested not only in His compassion for repenting sinners, but also in His patience with repining saints.

(ii) *The Growth and Destruction of the Gourd* (5–8). Jonah, notwithstanding, still hopes that some disaster will overtake the Ninevites. Accordingly, it is recorded that he went out of the city on the East side ; that there, probably from some eminence in the hills which commanded a good view, he might watch and wait. His heroism is manifest in that act. Instead of slinking back to his home in Galilee, glad to have accomplished a disagreeable duty and to return with a whole skin, he tarries. As a patriotic Israelite, he longs for the destruction of the Assyrian capital. Having constructed a booth of tree branches, such as the Jews were accustomed to make during the Feast of Tabernacles, he sat down

under its shade "till he might see what would become of the city." For the forty days have not yet expired, and some manifestation of the Divine wrath, he thinks, may yet be witnessed. "And the Lord God," we read, "prepared a gourd, and made it to grow up over Jonah." It is generally believed that the castor-oil plant is here referred to; which, because of its broad vine-like leaves, resembling the extended palm of the hand, has been called the *Palma Christi* or palmchrist. It is a plant which, under favourable conditions, grows with extraordinary rapidity; but a miracle of accelerated growth seems also to be indicated in the narrative. As Jonah's booth of twigs and branches did not provide adequate protection from the hot eastern sun, the immense vegetable screen which now overshadows it adds greatly to his comfort, and is gratefully appreciated. "So Jonah," we read, "was exceeding glad because of the gourd." Perhaps, too, he regarded it as a token of the Divine favour, and an indication that God intended to grant him what his heart so passionately desired. But, alas, what grew so rapidly was as rapidly destroyed. A swarm of caterpillars attack it; it begins to wither; within the space of one night it collapses to the ground. "On warm

days, when a small rain falls, black caterpillars are generated in great numbers on this plant, which, in one night, so often and so suddenly cut off its leaves, that only their bare ribs remain." [1] God's miraculous intervention along the line of natural processes is again manifest; for He it was, we are told, who " prepared a worm " which, when the morning rose, smote the gourd that it withered.[2] And that disaster was immediately succeeded by another, which is thus described, " And it came to pass when the sun arose, that God prepared a sultry east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live." Those who, while travelling in the East, have had an experience of the Sirocco, with its sand-laden wind and sweltering heat, and the utter lassitude which is its inevitable accompaniment, can easily visualize the prophet's distress. Dr. W. M. Thomson vividly describes one which over-

[1] Pusey, p. 57.

[2] " We know that God, when He does anything beyond the course of nature, does nevertheless come near to nature in His working. This is not indeed always the case; but we shall find for the most part that God has so worked as to outdo the course of nature, and yet not to desert nature altogether. . . . So, too, in this place, I do not doubt that God chose a plant, which would quickly grow up even to such a height as this, and yet that He surpassed the wonted course of nature."—(Calvin).

whelmed him as he was travelling from Lydd to Jerusalem. "There is no living thing abroad to make a noise. The birds hide in thickest shades; the fowls pant under the walls with open mouth and drooping wings; the flocks and herds take shelter in caves and under great rocks; the labourers retire from the fields, and close the windows and doors of their houses; and travellers hasten, as I did, to take shelter in the first cool place they can find." [1] The effect upon the prophet was such, that, to give the literal rendering of the Hebrew, "he asked for his life to die," as did Elijah under the juniper tree, when he fled from the wrath of Jezebel.

(iii) *The Revelation of the Compassion of Jehovah* (9–11). The extremity of Jonah's discomfiture provides the opportunity for the Self-revelation of God's mercy and forbearance. It is one of the most precious jewels of the Divine revelation in the whole realm of Scripture. "Doest thou well to be angry"—the question is repeated—with the addition, "for the gourd?" Is your anger justifiable because a mere vegetable covering, which came up in a night and perished in a night, is no longer available for your protection? "Yes," replies Jonah, "there is just cause. I do well

[1] *The Land and the Book*, p. 537.

to be angry even unto death." "Now," says Jehovah, "come and let us reason together." "You have pity on the gourd, but you have no pity on Nineveh. You greatly mourn because of the swift destruction of a perishable plant which gave you shelter; but you rejoice at the prospect of the destruction of a great city which encloses a multitude of innocent children and harmless beasts. For in that city there are not less than twelve times ten thousand, so young and void of understanding that they cannot discern between their right hand and their left. Have you no pity for the infants? Besides, do you not know that in the pastures that lie within those city walls there are many herds of cattle? Have you no pity for the beasts? Do you not realise that, notwithstanding the cruelty and wantonness of Nineveh, I am loth to stretch out my hand to destroy it, lest in punishing the wicked and the vile, I smite likewise the innocent and the good?" Thus Jehovah God, Whose tender mercies are over all His works, Who would have spared Sodom if but ten righteous men could have been found in it, tries to justify before His angry messenger the compassion in His own heart of infinite love. The teeming multitudes of Nineveh were not one indistinguishable mass. Each individual

soul of the righteous and the innocent was precious in the sight of Him without Whose knowledge not a sparrow falls from the house-top to the ground. The supreme revelation of the prophecy is contained in the exquisitely simple but sublime words with which the book abruptly ends: "And the Lord said, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night and perished in a night; and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city; wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

"Even the miracle of Jonah's remaining three days and three nights in the whale's belly does not involve so much of an interruption of the ordinary course of Nature as is implied in the account of Christ's death and resurrection. Indeed, on surveying the Old Testament in its entirety, one cannot avoid a feeling of surprise and admiration at the success with which the miraculous accounts are limited to the critical points in the history of the race when new revelations of world-wide importance were to be made."

—(Wright: "Scientific Aspects of Christian Evidences," p. 171).

"Christ treats it as a true history, to be understood in its plain sense, and expounds the meaning of it, hitherto unrevealed, viz., a prophecy, a typical representation of Himself—of His own wonderful Death, Burial and Resurrection. Thus the history of Jonah is proved to be true by the testimony of Him Who is the Truth. By this specimen of exposition, our blessed Lord delivers a divine protest against the Scepticism of modern days, which denies the verity of the miracles of the Old Testament, and against the Rationalism, which attempts to explain them away."

—(Bp. Wordsworth: "N.T. Notes": Matt. xii. 40, 41).

The avowed materialism of the nineteenth century is not now so manifest, because it is seen by the generality of people to be unreasonable. As Lord Balfour has tersely put it, "We now know too much about matter to be materialists." Science has acquainted us with the marvellous in the realm of nature, to so great a degree, that we are beginning to be surprised at nothing. A hundred years ago our forefathers knew very little about Electricity. What would they have said, could someone have told them of the happenings of to-day? Recently, an official speaking from the Poldhu wireless station in Cornwall, was heard distinctly in the Marconi office in Sydney, Australia! We can imagine how the possibility of such an occurrence would have been ridiculed not long ago. The Chemistry of to-day demonstrates that things happen which fifty years ago scientists would have declared to be contrary to the laws of nature. Wireless telegraphy and telephony; speech and song reproduced when the lips of speaker and singer are silent in the grave; aerial flight over vast distances with comparative ease and security,—all these common occurrences of our time would have been regarded, in the middle of the nineteenth century, as impossible or miraculous.

pen; therefore anything in history of a miraculous nature is *ipso facto* to be regarded as incredible. That sentence may be said to describe the attitude of a multitude in a former generation, and of not a few in the present. It was practically the view of the author of *Supernatural Religion*, the once famous book, which was destined, many thought in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, to destroy Christianity. The author tried to maintain that miracles were incredible, and therefore that no testimony could authenticate them. Haeckel occupied a similar standpoint. It is an utterly unreasonable position.

Sir George Stokes, a President of the Royal Society, in his *Gifford Lectures* for 1891,[1] said: "Admit the existence of a personal God and the possibility of miracle follows at once. If the laws of Nature are carried on in accordance with His will, He who willed them may cause their suspension, and if any difficulty should be felt as to their suspension, we are not even obliged to suppose that they have been suspended; it may be that the event which we call a miracle was brought about not by any suspension of the laws in ordinary operation, but by the superaddition of something not ordinarily in operation."

[1] p. 24.

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In short, the miracles of to-day are the commonplaces of to-morrow.

It has therefore become necessary to define very clearly what we mean by miracle, since now it is so manifestly difficult to distinguish between what is possible and impossible, what is natural and supernatural. A miracle is not an occurrence which is contrary to nature. A miracle is only something which we cannot explain, because it transcends our experience. Several of the miracles performed by Jesus Christ are now "explained away," as, for example, the healing of the paralytic, and the release of the demon-possessed, as having been due, not to any superhuman power possessed by Christ, but to His employment of the power of healing by suggestion, which in modern times is widely practised. Whether that be so I am not concerned here to discuss. What I urge is that it is unreasonable to refuse to give credence to the historicity of an event, because of the presence in the record of what is generally called miracle, that is, something which is not contrary to nature, but something which cannot be explained by the ordinary processes of nature, so far as they are known to us.

Further, it is almost impossible to conceive of a Divine revelation being communicated to man-

kind, apart altogether from the association of miraculous phenomena. In the wisdom of God, miracle has been employed to arrest attention and to authenticate Divine communication; to be its appropriate countersign. This has been the general belief of the Church, and has been expressed by her best apologists in every age. Dr. Salmon, the profound scholar and thinker of Trinity College, Dublin, said: "A non-miraculous Christianity is as much a contradiction in terms as a quadrangular circle." What is true with respect to Christianity pertains also to that Divine revelation which preceded and prepared for its appearing.

We must also take into consideration not only the nature and necessity of miracle in a Divine revelation, but also the measure and the time of its occurrence. The surprising thing about the Bible is the comparative absence of the miraculous element. It is a widespread but false notion that the Scriptural histories are full of miracles. On the contrary, miracle occurs but seldom. In the Book of Genesis, which covers a period of more than 2,000 years at the lowest computation, not a single miracle is recorded as having been wrought by human agency. Nothing of the kind is attributed to Abraham or any of the patriarchs.

This feature alone serves to distinguish the Bible from the pagan mythologies. When the miraculous element does enter into the sacred history, it is at some particular epoch, the nature or circumstances of which demanded some special sign from Heaven. As the late Dr. Monro Gibson wrote: "Even where God Himself is represented as doing things out of the general course of nature, it is only at long intervals, and very rarely, as in the translation of Enoch, the judgment of the Flood, the confusion of tongues, the birth of Isaac. Remember that these events were centuries apart from each other. Even if there had been a miracle for every century, which there is not, you could scarcely say that they were 'very plentiful.' If you look at the history perspectively, you will learn first, that all through Bible times, miracles were not the rule, but the exception; and, more particularly, that the miracles cluster around particular epochs when there was special need for such signs of divine presence and power: as at the time of the Exodus after the long, dark interval of Egyptian bondage; at the time of Israel's deepest declension, when the prophets Elijah and Elisha were called in a special way to witness for the Lord; and above all, in the times of Christ and the founding of the Church,

after the long and silent interval from the restoration to the Advent." [1]

Now it is important to remember that Jonah's ministry was exercised in just one of those periods when miracle was being manifest in God's dealings and communications with His people. The prophetic ministry of Elijah and Elisha, the predecessors of Jonah, was characterized by a comparative abundance of supernatural events. They are as marvellous as anything recorded in the history of Jonah. One cannot be reasonably accepted and the other rejected; they stand or fall together. Therefore, as we approach the investigation of the phenomenal events recorded, we ought not to allow prejudice to sway us; the record must not be rejected on *a priori* grounds; the whole of the evidence on both sides should be impartially examined.

[1] *The Ages before Moses*, pp. 40–41.

(i.) The Physical Miracle: The Preservation of Jonah.

A widespread fallacy must be summarily disposed of. It used to be argued that the story is incredible because of the supposed restricted swallowing capacity of a whale. Its throat is so small, it was once affirmed, that it cannot even swallow a herring! Such reasoning is a crude example of the ignorance, all too common, which is so productive of unbelief in the Holy Scriptures. For the sake at least of some, the objection must be dealt with. The Scripture nowhere states that it was a whale which swallowed Jonah; and, even if the Scripture had so stated, there are whales with a throat capacity so immense that they are capable of swallowing not one only but half a dozen men. In the O.T. record the Hebrew word [1] means literally "a great fish"; in the N.T. reference to the event the Greek word [2] employed may be accurately translated, as in the margin of the Revised Version, a "sea-monster." There are over sixty kinds of cachalot; and every

[1] דָּג גָּדוֹל [2] τοῦ κήτους

one of them, with the exception of the Greenland whale, has a gullet in proportion to its size. When certain unbelievers urged the above objection, they were arguing from the exception to the rule. The common Sperm whale has been thus described: "The throat is capacious enough to give passage to the body of a man, presenting a strong contrast to the contracted gullet of the Greenland whale." [1] This scientific testimony has, in recent years, been graphically illustrated by Mr. Frank T. Bullen, the sailor-author, in his interesting book, *The Cruise of the Cachalot.*[2] After describing the capture of a huge sperm whale, he writes: "During the conflict I had not noticed what now claimed attention—several great masses of white, semi-transparent-looking substance floating about, of huge size and irregular shape. But one of these curious lumps came floating by, as we lay, tugged at by several fish, and I immediately asked the mate if he could tell me what it was, and where it came from. He told me that, when dying, the cachalot always ejected the contents of his stomach, which were invariably composed of such masses as we saw before us; that he believed the stuff to be portions

[1] Thomas Beale: *Observations on the Natural History of the Spermaceti Whale*, p. 294.

[2] pp. 77-82.

of big cuttle-fish, bitten off by the whale for the purpose of swallowing, but he wasn't sure. Anyhow, I could bring this piece alongside now, if I liked, and see. Secretly wondering at the indifference shown by this officer of forty years' whaling experience to such a wonderful fact as appeared to be here presented, I thanked him, and, sticking the boat-hook into the lump, drew it alongside. It was at once evident that it was a massive fragment of cuttle-fish—tentacle or arm—as thick as a stout man's body, and with six or seven sucking discs, or *acetabula* on it. These were about as large as a saucer, and on their inner edge were thickly set with hooks or claws all round the rim, sharp as needles, and almost the shape and size of a tiger's. To what manner of awful monster this portion of limb belonged I could only faintly imagine; but of course I remembered, as any sailor would, that from my earliest sea-going I had been told that the cuttle-fish was the biggest in the sea, although I never even began to think that it might be true until now. For the first time it was possible to understand that, contrary to the usual notion of a whale being unable to swallow a herring, here was a kind of whale that could swallow—well, a block four or five feet

square, apparently ; who lived upon creatures as large as himself, if one might judge of their bulk by the sample to hand ; but being unable, from only possessing teeth in one jaw, to masticate his food, was compelled to tear it in sizable pieces, bolt it whole, and leave his commissariat department to do the rest."

Describing another specimen, the capture of which he witnessed, he says : " The ejected food was in masses of enormous size, larger than any we had yet seen on the voyage, some of them being estimated to be of the size of the hatch-house, viz., eight feet by six feet into six feet." In other words, this particular whale had swallowed, and afterwards, when dying, had vomited up a mass which was about thirty-six feet square, or equal to the bodies of six stout men compressed into one !

It is idle, therefore, to argue on scientific grounds that the swallowing and subsequent ejection of the prophet from the interior of a great fish was impossible. The most miraculous feature in Jonah's experience, however, was not that he was swallowed and afterwards ejected, but that he was preserved alive in the sea-monster for " three days and three nights." Some thoughtful men believe that Jonah actually died and was

raised to life again,—a perfect type of Our Lord's death and resurrection. But it is needless to introduce into the region of the argument what can only be speculative. All we have to determine here is whether the recorded event is such as we can, without straining faith or loyalty to truth, accept as historical, or on the other hand, must reject as absolutely incredible. Common sense alone suggests that if a man can invent a mechanical submarine capable of preserving fifty men alive, surely it is not difficult to believe that the Almighty could, if He chose, adapt an animal submarine to be capable of holding one.

Pusey has preserved the following remarkable story, told, he says, by a natural historian of repute: "In 1758, in stormy weather, a sailor fell overboard from a frigate in the Mediterranean. A shark was close by, which, as he was swimming and crying for help, took him in his wide throat, so that he forthwith disappeared. Other sailors had leapt into the sloop to help their comrade, while yet swimming; the captain had a gun which stood on the deck discharged at the fish, which struck it so that it cast out the sailor which it had in its throat, who was taken up, alive and little injured, by the sloop which had

now come up. The fish was harpooned, taken up on the frigate and dried. The captain made a present of the fish to the sailor, who by God's Providence had been so wonderfully preserved. The sailor went round Europe exhibiting it. He came to Franconia, and it was publicly exhibited here in Erlangen, as also at Nurnberg and other places. The dried fish was delineated. It was 20 feet long, and, with expanded fins, 9 feet wide, and weighed 3,924 lbs." [1]

Sir Francis Fox, the eminent scientific engineer, records a visit to a whaling station in the far North of Great Britain, where the manager informed his visitors that the throat of the sperm whale can swallow lumps of food eight feet in diameter. Asked what was the largest thing they had ever found inside, he replied, "The skeleton of a shark sixteen feet in length." [2]

Professor Kõnig, in his article on "Jonah" in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, refers to the remarkable experience of James Bartley, and apparently accepts the story as authentic.[3] Dr. Lukyn Williams, however, has stated that he has

[1] *op. cit.*, p. 46.

[2] *Sixty-three Years of Engineering*, p. 298.

[3] In February, 1891, an English whaling ship called 'The Star of the East' was near the Falkland Islands, when it sighted a sperm whale three miles away. Two boats were launched. The harpooner in the first boat succeeded in spear-

carefully investigated it, and cannot accept its authenticity.[1] That conclusion, until further evidence be forthcoming, can hardly be questioned; but apparently the story had originally such marks of genuineness as to obtain credence from the German professor, who is a Higher Critic, and from the late M. de Parville, the scientific editor of the *Journal des Debats*, who considered it "worthy of belief."

Now all the testimony here cited, besides refuting the objection referred to above, is valuable because it indicates a principle in the Divine action, which it is of great importance to keep in

ing the whale, which in its agony lashed its tail so violently that it capsized the second boat, and all the men in it fell into the sea. One was drowned and one entirely disappeared. After the whale had been killed and its carcase brought alongside the ship, the men began the work of removing the blubber, toiling throughout one day and part of the night. Next morning they fastened tackle to the stomach of the monster and hoisted it on to the deck. The sailors were then startled by perceiving something within it which gave spasmodic sign of life. Examining further, they found their missing comrade, James Bartley, doubled up and unconscious. He was roused by being bathed with sea water; but he had lost his reason. He was carefully nursed, and his reason returned. Later he was able to resume his duties. He remembered being thrown into the sea and hearing the sound of the lashing of the waves, after which a great darkness enveloped him. He felt about him, and his hands came in contact with a slimy yielding substance which shrank from his touch. Then he realised with awful horror that he had been swallowed by the whale. The heat was almost unbearable; he felt weak and sick; but mercifully he became unconscious and remembered nothing more until he found himself in the captain's cabin.

[1] See *Expository Times* for Aug., 1906, and Feb., 1907.

mind. All the marvellous phenomena recorded are, without exception, operations along the line of natural processes. The mighty wind and tempestuous sea; the great fish which held the prophet; the gourd which grew and perished with such remarkable rapidity; were all marvels of accelerated natural processes. Water is turned into wine every year by a purely natural process of gradual operation; it was turned into wine instantaneously at the marriage feast of Cana, by the word of the Son of God Incarnate. "The signs wrought by Christ harmonise with His teaching in another way: they never have the air of ostentatiously overriding and superseding Nature. . . . Fresh energy is given to natural powers, and effects are produced of vast magnitude and with astonishing rapidity; but these powers seem to work through the organs and along the channels which nature provides. . . . The signs, accordingly, are worked in such a way that it is hard to mark the particular point where what is called the supernatural comes into play—to say, in fact, when nature ends and God begins." [1]

A thoughtful scientific writer has truly said: "Three characteristics of the miracles of the Bible

[1] Latham: *Pastor Pastorum*, pp. 88–89.

are especially noteworthy: they are not incongruous; they are all for a worthy purpose; they are not superabundant." [1] Can we say that the miracle of Jonah's entombment and subsequent emergence was for a worthy purpose? The answer, surely, must be affirmative. The harmony of the Divine revelation in the Scriptures demands it. The Old Testament was a preparation for the New. In the one there is foreshadowing, in the other fulfilment; in the one the type, in the other the antitype. Christ is latent in the Old, patent in the New. The Death of Christ, as a sacrifice for sin, is variously portrayed in the Old Testament ritual and prophetic utterances. In divers manners did God prepare the minds of men to apprehend the significance of the Eternal Sacrifice, when it should have been consummated on the Cross. We can point to many passages in the O.T. Scriptures where Christ's death is prefigured. Whither can we go for a clear and illuminating type of Christ's resurrection from the dead? St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians xv. 3–4, says that the substance of his preaching was not only that Christ died for our sins "according to the scriptures," but also that He rose again the third day "according to the scriptures." To which

[1] G. F. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

Scriptures did St. Paul refer ? The only Scripture that quite vividly prefigures Christ's resurrection from the dead is the history of Jonah's entombment and deliverance. As a foreshadowing of such a tremendous event, we can then with full confidence affirm that Jonah's experience was indeed " for a worthy purpose." And, Jesus Christ Himself, in the days of His flesh, with unerring finger, pointed to that historic event as a direct type and prophecy of the great experience which awaited Him, when He said : " As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea-monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." [1]

Jonah's experience, therefore, should never be regarded as an isolated incident. Like Abraham's offering of Isaac on " one of the mountains of Moriah," in which district was the hill afterwards called Calvary,[2] it forms part of a progressive revelation. As Orelli says : " The mission of Jonah to Nineveh, so epoch-making in the Old Covenant, stands in intimately close relation to the central teaching of the New Covenant (the imparting

[1] St. Matt. xii. 40. (R.V.M.)

[2] *Cf.* Gen. xxii. 2 with 2 Chron. iii. 1. The place of the sacrifice was Divinely indicated, as the victim for the sacrifice was Divinely provided.

of salvation to all the world through Christ's death and resurrection). From this point of view, therefore, the miracle, which is a stumbling-block to many, appears fully justified on religious grounds." [1]

Miracle, moreover, persists. The preservation of the Jews is a phenomenon far more miraculous than the preservation of Jonah. Without a land, without a king, without a temple, without a sacrifice, and scattered throughout the earth, God's chosen people have been preserved, and their distinct nationality maintained, for well-nigh two thousand years, contrary to all the laws which govern the rise and fall of nations. This is a miracle which is manifest before our eyes.

(ii.) The Moral Miracle: The Conversion of Nineveh.

The second greater miracle of the book is that of the Conversion of Nineveh through the preaching of Jonah. This phenomenon far transcends the first in wonderment. But there is an intimate relationship between the two. Without the first

[1] *Minor Prophets*, p. 172.

miracle the second could not have been accomplished. One prepared the way for the other. How widespread the repentance of the Ninevites was, is revealed by the description: "And the people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them." [1] Revivals of religion are, almost invariably, from the bottom upwards. The common people heard Christ gladly. The conversion of Nineveh began among the masses of the people; but did not end there. When the king heard the prophet's awful declaration, he and his nobles resolved at once to participate in the national fast. For it is recorded: "And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he made proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water: but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

[1] iii. 5.

Who knoweth whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" [1]

Now this immense religious upheaval was brought about, be it remembered, by the preaching of a single foreign missionary. In that fact is a stupendous phenomenon which far exceeds the miracle of the preservation of the prophet. How can it be accounted for? What unique gift did Jonah possess for the accomplishment of such a stupendous reformation? It is this part of the narrative which most arrests my attention. As a mission preacher, the writer seeks to find the secret of Jonah's success. Not long ago, two missioners, of whom he was one, went out to Winnipeg, by the invitation of the Archbishop and the clergy of the Archdeaconry. They conducted missions in the Cathedral and about twenty-four parish churches in the city and its environs. For three months they laboured ceaselessly, preaching the Gospel of the Grace of God. Were signs of repentance manifest? Yes, undoubtedly. But when one compares the results of the labours of two missioners in Winnipeg during three months, with those achieved by Jonah in Nineveh in one day, it is clear that the prophet of Gath-

[1] iii 6–9.

hepher possessed some power of a very extraordinary character. What was it? It has been suggested that the political condition of Assyria at the time was such as to create a feeling of fearful apprehension among its citizens. The reign of Jeroboam II coincides nearly with the period from the death of Ramman-Nirari to the accession of Tiglath-Pileser—a period which was characterized by apparent inactivity and decadence in the Assyrian rule. It was precisely that condition of abeyance in foreign aggression on the part of Assyria which gave Jeroboam II the opportunity for the extension of his dominions. The political situation alone, however, while it may have predisposed the Ninevites to hearken to the prophet's message, could never have accounted for so powerful an effect upon their hearts and consciences as to produce an instantaneous religious transformation almost without parallel. Is any other explanation forthcoming? Yes, and it is one which completely satisfies. Our Divine Lord Himself has solved the problem. By the use of one word He has illumined and harmonized, in a manner quite unsuspected by most, the Old Testament record and the New. When the impenitent and unbelieving Jews demanded from Him some signal manifestation of power,

which should authenticate His Messianic claim, saying, "Master we would see a sign from thee," Jesus replied: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet." [1]

Now what is a sign? A sign is an occurence, which, because it manifests the presence and operation of supernatural power, arrests the attention and disposes men to believe. A sign may therefore be defined as the sure credential of a Divine commission. When Nicodemus, the learned and powerful Pharisee, came by night to have an interview with the Prophet of the despised village of Nazareth, he prefaced his questions by a great admission: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these *signs* [2] that thou doest, except God be with him." The earthquake which shook the prison-house in Philippi, snapping the chains of Paul and Silas, and opening the doors, was a sign to the jailor of the Divine character of the mission of his prisoners, and an authentication of the truth of their message; so that he immediately cried out, "Sirs what must I do to be saved?" [3] In Athens, Paul preached

[1] Matt. xii. 38-9. [2] St. John iii. 2. [3] Acts xvi. 23-31.

'Jesus and the resurrection" [1]; emphasizing the rising from the tomb as the Divine attestation of the Saviourhood of Christ, and therefore a sign which should dispose men to believe. Now what was the idea which our Lord meant to convey when He said, "No sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet." Godet's comment is the sufficient answer: "It was as one who had miraculously escaped from death that Jonah presented himself before the Ninevites, summoning them to anticipate the danger which threatened them; it is as the Risen One that I (by my messengers) shall proclaim salvation to the men of this generation." [2]

The news of Jonah's unique experience undoubtedly preceded his arrival in Nineveh. The heathen sailors, who had cast him into the sea and were witnesses of his submergence, very probably acted as heralds of the prophet's appearing. Jonah's face and form, moreover, must have borne unmistakable marks of his entombment. It is easy, then, to imagine how terrifying was the effect which the Hebrew prophet's proclamation made upon the superstitious Assyrians. "Here," they would repeat, "is a messenger of the Most High God, who at the first refused to

[1] Acts xvii. 18. [2] *Commentary on St. Luke*, xi. 30.

come to Nineveh, willing to be drowned rather than obey, but, being cast into the sea, was gripped and held in the belly of a sea-monster until he yielded to the Divine will, and was then vomited forth upon the dry land and bidden again to come to our city and cry: 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'" It was not merely the threat of the impending judgment, but the fact that the threat was accompanied by an unmistakable sign that the messenger had indeed been sent from God, which brought the Ninevites to repentance; so that throughout the proud capital, all, from the king on his throne to the beasts in the field, joined in the national humiliation. The miracle of Jonah's preservation prepared the way, and provides the explanation, of Nineveh's conversion.

(iii.) The Spiritual Miracle: The Revelation of God.

The supreme miracle in the book is the phenomenon of its Divine inspiration. The character of God which is exhibited, especially in the

final portion, reaches the very summit of the Divine revelation. Cornill, a devout modern critic, pays his tribute to its exalted nature in words which we gladly quote : " One of the deepest and grandest things ever written. I should like to exclaim to anyone who approaches it : Put thy shoes from off thy feet for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." The patience and infinite condescension of Jehovah in His dealings with Jonah, and His all-embracing compassion for the penitent wicked, the innocent children, and the harmless beasts enclosed together within the walls of Assyria's metropolis, are a revelation of God's character precisely as it was depicted centuries later, by the Lord Jesus Himself, the Light of the World. Especially in the Sermon on the Mount, and in His parabolic teaching, particularly in the Prodigal Son, the pearl of the parables of the Kingdom, Jesus Christ emphasized and illumined the truth which was so arrestingly adumbrated in the prophecy of Jonah. God's tender mercies are over all His works. He is the Protector of the weak and helpless ; with a heart full of compassion for the erring ; slow to punish, quick to forgive ; with an omniscience as far reaching as His infinite love.

Now, here we have a miracle of inspiration. The revelation of the character of God in the Book of Jonah corresponds precisely to the portrayal of the Eternal Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. And there is a marvellous consistency, not only with the truth revealed in Christ centuries later, but also with its foregleams centuries earlier. Jehovah, who was willing to spare Sodom should ten righteous men be found within it, will assuredly spare Nineveh for the sake of twelve times ten thousand guiltless children. And it is substantially the same character of God which was revealed in the days of David. What the perishing gourd was to Jonah, the slain ewe lamb in the parable of Nathan the prophet was to the adulterous king. The might and majesty coupled with the love and tenderness of God are there historically portrayed, as in David's Psalm of exultant praise they are poetically presented. "Magnify Him that rideth upon the heavens as it were upon an horse; praise Him in His Name Jah, and rejoice before him. He is a father of the fatherless and defendeth the cause of the widows: even God in his holy habitation." [1] But the characteristic feature of the revelation in Jonah is the all-embracing

[1] Psalm lxviii. 4, 5 (P.B.V.).

compassion and love of God; an anticipation of the wideness of His mercy, to be proclaimed in the holy Gospel to every creature.

Dr. Peake, who rejects the idea of any real connection between the prophecy and the prophet, is yet compelled to recognise its sublimity, and says: "That out of the stony heart of Judaism such a book should come is nothing less than a marvel of Divine grace." [1] Who then lit the torch of Divine illumination in the soul of the author of the Book of Jonah? There can be but one satisfying answer. It was God the Holy Spirit. But that is a miracle in the realm of the spiritual! The crucial question in present-day religious discussion is, Has the knowledge of God originated from above or from below? Has pure religion come from the angelic heights by Divine condescension, or from the animal depths by human soul-uprising? Is the Christian religion only the product of a human evolutionary process, or the Divine deposit of a supernatural revelation? Only one answer can fully satisfy. God, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake unto the fathers through the prophets; and in these last days He has spoken to us in His Son.

The most reasonable supposition surely is,

[1] *Commentary*, p. 558.

what all tradition testifies, that the pearl of Divine revelation, which is enshrined in this Old Testament book, has been conveyed through the medium of the prophet whose name it bears. Which is easier to believe? The choice lies between two alternatives. This prophecy and the truth it conveys originated in the actual experiences of Jonah, and the communications which he directly received from Jehovah. On the contrary, says the modern critic, the pure substance of Divine truth, which the book undoubtedly contains, was compounded in the soul of some unknown author, living in an unknown territory, at an unknown date, who adopted the name of Jonah for an unknown reason, and wrote the story as a piece of historical fiction for a problematic purpose. Let them who can accept such a theory. The traditional belief, strengthened by the testimony of the Lord Jesus, is immeasurably more reasonable. Jonah Ben-Amittai, the successor of Elisha and the contemporary of Hosea, was the medium of this Divine revelation. His chastening experience prepared him to receive it. God pours the treasures of His grace into vessels that are emptied and cleansed. Humbled and purified, he, like Moses on the Mount and Elijah under the juniper tree, was conditioned to hear the Voice

of the Most High revealing Himself. The abrupt termination, after the lightning flash of the Divine revelation had been vouchsafed, resembles the close of the Book of Job, after God had revealed Himself in the majesty and the mystery of His ways; and, though it is not recorded, we can well imagine that Jonah, when the Voice had ceased, was like Job, humbled to the earth, and cried, "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I loathe my words and repent in dust and ashes." [1]

NOTE: "THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS"

Needless difficulty has been created by a tendency in some circles to fasten a literal meaning upon the phrase "three days and three nights." E.g., Canon R. Winterbotham (in the *Expositor*, Jan., 1923) writes as follows: "Unless He was mistaken, our Lord could not have committed Himself to the statement in St. Matthew xii. 40,

[1] Job xlii. 5–6 (R.V.M.).

inasmuch as He did not remain in the tomb 'three days and three nights.'" He then proceeds to argue that the passage is an interpolation of unknown origin for which our Lord is not responsible; but, he wisely adds: "This conclusion is confessedly a difficult one. It is open to anyone to reject it."

On the other hand, Godet, the profound New Testament exegete, affirms in accordance with a fundamental canon of criticism (*Commentary on St. Luke*, Vol. II, p. 72): "As to the words of Matt. xii. 39, 40, they must be authentic. No one would have put into the mouth of Jesus the expression, *three days and three nights*, when Jesus had actually remained in the tomb only one day and two nights." It frequently occurs that a passage in the Bible, which, when superficially regarded, appears to present an insuperable difficulty, reveals after thorough investigation the complete trustworthiness of the Scriptural narratives. This is one instance.

It is perfectly plain that Christ's body, after His Crucifixion, did not lie in the grave for a complete period of seventy-two hours. It should be equally plain that the words ought to be interpreted by us in the sense in which they were uttered. Now what the phrase precisely conveyed in the every-

day speech of our Lord's times can be clearly illustrated. E.g., after the Crucifixion, the high ecclesiastics of Jerusalem came to Pilate with the request: "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure *until the third day*." (Matt. xxvii. 63, 64). The Rev. David Baron, an expert in all that concerns the language and the customs of the Jews, writes in his *Types, Psalms, and Prophecies*, (p. 377), "According to Jewish law, part of the day stands for the whole, for 'if a day had been once entered on, even for a few minutes, the whole twenty-four hours were reckoned to the person who had so entered on the day.' If a child is born in the last hour, or even in the last few minutes of a day, it is counted as a whole day of the period of time within which he must be circumcised. Thus *legally*, according to Jewish reckoning, the Crucifixion and Burial of our Lord having taken place before the 16th Nisan actually commenced, He may be said to have been in the grave 'three days and three nights,' viz., *Friday*, to which legally belonged the night of what we should call Thursday; *Saturday*, consisting of the night of Friday and the day of Saturday; and *Sunday* to which

belonged the night of Saturday and the very early morn of Sunday."

It will doubtless surprise many to learn that in Great Britain there is an analogous mode of reckoning time, in the administration of the law. Sir Robert Anderson, who was the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, in *The Bible and Modern Criticism* (p. 272), wrote: "A prison chaplain would find no difficulty in explaining this to his congregation. Our civil day begins at midnight, and the law reckons any part of a day as a day. Therefore while a sentence of three days means three days of twenty-four hours, equal to seventy-two hours, a prisoner under such a committal is seldom more than forty hours in gaol; and I have known cases where the period was in fact only thirty-three hours. And this mode of reckoning and of speaking was as familiar to the Jew as it is to the *habitués* of our criminal courts. 'A day and a night make an *Onah*, and a part of an *Onah* is as the whole.' Dr. Lightfoot quotes this Jewish saying in his *Horae Hebraicae* (Matt. xii. 40); and he adds: 'Therefore Christ may truly be said to have been in his grave three *Onoth*, . . . the consent of the schools and the dialect of the nation agreeing thereunto.'"

That the same usage of speech was observed in O.T. days is evident from 2 Chron. x. 5–12. Rehoboam said, "Come again unto me *after three days*." . . . "So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam *on the third day*." A similar instance occurs in Esther iv. 16; v. 1. The Queen's order to her people was, "Fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink, three days, night or day." Yet "*on the third day*" the royal banquet which Esther had prepared was celebrated. There is therefore no reason to regard the phrase "three days and three nights" as signifying a period of seventy-two hours, either in the experience of Jonah, or in that of our Lord.

"The world treats truth as it does Jesus Christ; it does not absolutely deny, it diminishes it."

—(Vinet: "Outlines of Theology," p. 546).

"I say this, because it is always in contempt and setting aside of the Old Testament that Rationalism has begun. First, its historical truth—then its theocratic dispensation and the types and prophecies connected with it, are swept away; so that Christ came to fulfil nothing, and becomes only a teacher or a martyr; and thus the way is paved for a similar rejection of the New Testament; beginning with the narratives of the birth and infancy as theocratic myths—advancing to the denial of His miracles—then attacking the truthfulness of His own sayings, which are grounded on the Old Testament as a revelation from God—and so finally leaving us nothing in the Scriptures but, as a German writer of this school has expressed it, 'a mythology not so attractive as that of Greece.' That this is the course which unbelief has run in Germany, should be a pregnant warning to the decriers of the Old Testament among ourselves."

—(Dean Alford: "Greek Test.", Matt. v. 18).

Chapter VI

JONAH AND THE GREATER THAN JONAH

What is altogether unique in the utterances of Jesus is that the august claims which He makes for Himself do not shock us, but appear on the contrary to be natural and inevitable. Words which, from the lips of another, would sound presumptuous or blasphemous, seem, if Jesus speaks them, words of truth and soberness. "A greater than Jonah is here!" Jonah, Solomon, the Queen of Sheba, the citizens of Nineveh are not, in the eyes of Jesus, mere *dramatis personæ*; they are all figures which stand out conspicuously upon the page of history. And, with a holy boldness, He claims for Himself a position of superiority to the one Hebrew prophet who was the means of the conversion of a Gentile city, and to the one Hebrew king whose wisdom drew a

queenly seeker after truth from " the ends of the earth." The occasion of the utterance was the manifest unbelief of the Jews, particularly of the Scribes and Pharisees. They came demanding of Him some sign—a portent unmistakable—which should authenticate His claim, and make it easier for them to believe. Christ marvels at their unbelief ; contrasts their attitude to Him with that of Nineveh to Jonah ; and utters the solemn warning that, in the Day of Divine Justice, the believing Ninevites will be summoned as witnesses to the condemnation of the unbelieving Jews. " The men of Nineveh," He said, " shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it : for they repented at the preaching of Jonah ; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here ! " The claim which Christ makes may be considered as two-fold. He is greater than Jonah as a prophet ; He is greater than Jonah as a patriot.

(i.) Greater as a Prophet.

At once we recognise the justice of the claim. Jonah was but a voice uttering the message which

he had received ; Jesus was the Word, the Truth Incarnate. " I am the Light of the World ; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." This surpassing claim of the Divine Lord has been tested and proven true in a million-fold experience. If Jesus be not the world's Illuminator, there is none. He is "the Dayspring from on High," or we dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. But what in theory is generally admitted is, in practice, commonly denied. A flippancy of unbelief, which appals, is widespread. Jesus Christ, the " Greater than Jonah," is the Prince of all the prophets who have preceded or followed Him. Who will dare to correct His declarations ? He has won for Himself the place of pre-eminence. He *is* the Supreme Authority. To whom can we go if not to Him Who alone has the words of Eternal Life ? The only place of security is that occupied by one who has the written Word of God in the hand, and the revealing Spirit of God, the Holy Interpreter, within the heart. To great purpose did the Lord Jesus admonish His disciples : " Be not ye called Rabbi." [1] One only is our Rabbi, even the Divine Teacher Himself who promised to be with His followers all the

[1] *St. Matt.* xxiii. 8.

days to the end of the age, to lead them by His Spirit into the truth. God's profoundest revelations are commonly given in words of one syllable. Thus it is that many comparatively uneducated people have a deep comprehension of pure Divinity. "*Pectus quod facit theologum.*" The Spirit attends the Word when it is pondered by the seeker after truth. "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee." [1] It is thus that God addresses the soul of everyone within the sound of the holy Gospel. To respond thereto is our highest privilege and prerogative, with the Bible as the medium of communication. Neither priest nor professor must presume to intervene unduly. For there is a spiritual aristocracy in the Kingdom of Heaven, of which no one can become a member merely through the possession of great intellectual power, any more than by virtue of exalted ecclesiastical position. Spiritual things must be spiritually discerned. And the thanksgiving of our Lord, uttered in the days of His flesh, has not ceased to be offered: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." [2]

[1] Ezek. ii. 1. [2] St. Luke, x. 21.

(ii.) Greater as a Patriot.

"Now Caiaphas was he which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people." [1] More than once in its past history, a crisis had arisen in its fate which called for sublime self-sacrifice, if the elect nation was to be saved. To the everlasting honour of Hebrew patriotism, the call was never sounded without evoking immediate response. Even Esther the Jewish maiden, chosen to be the consort of a heathen king, dared through love and loyalty to her race to risk the royal displeasure and incur the penalty of death, saying with heroic resignation, "If I perish, I perish!" We have considered how Moses at Sinai presented himself as a vicarious offering to put away the guilt of the nation's apostasy. "Blot me out of Thy book, but spare the people!" And, thus pleading, he prevailed. Ineffable mystery that a righteous man's intercession can have such power with God! Paul, likewise, was ready to be anathema for Israel's sake. And Jonah, too, was animated

[1] St. John, xviii. 14.

by a magnificent, though mistaken spirit of intense Hebrew patriotism, when he made the great refusal and went out from the presence of the Lord, in his own eyes a condemned soul; making so great a sacrifice that his nation might be preserved.

But the "Greater than Jonah" was greatest Patriot of all! Christ's love for His country is clearly manifest in the Gospel narratives. Witness His lamentation over Jerusalem. There are two words in the Greek New Testament descriptive of the grief of our Lord. One represents Him weeping silently, as at the grave of Lazarus.[1] The other represents Him sobbing loudly like one broken-hearted. It is the latter word which occurs in the pathetic description: "And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."[2] And how mournful was the expression of His last farewell: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye

[1] St. John, xi. 35. [2] St. Luke, xix. 41, 42, (R.V.)

would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." [1]

Though Moses, Jonah, Paul, alike were ready to perish for their nation's sake, God the All-merciful would not accept their sacrifice. But Mystery of Mysteries! what He would not accept from them He did accept from His only begotten Son. The Incarnation was primarily and principally for the purpose of Atonement. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." [2] That was the purpose of the real *kenosis*—the laying aside of the insignia of His Divine Majesty, and the descent, step by step, into the valley of abject humiliation—"taking upon Him the form of a bondservant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." [3] Jesus Christ was the greatest of all patriots because His was the superlative Self-sacrifice. "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends." But Christ died for His enemies also. In the very extremity of His shame and suffering He prayed for His murderers; and,

[1] St. Matt., xxiii. 37, 38. [2] St Mark, x. 45.
[3] Philippians, ii. 7, 8.

to the penitent crucified by His side who had previously mocked Him, He, with a word of gracious promise, opened wide the gates of Paradise. He died not for His own nation only, but for all the nations. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!"

But who presumes to comprehend all that the Self-abnegation of Jesus cost? Here we are on the brink of Divine Mystery. We cannot penetrate within the cloud; but, like the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, we can hear voices and obtain glimpses; and what we hear and see appals. The agony of Gethsemane compelled Him to cry, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Oh the horror of it all as it appeared to the vision of our Redeemer! "And His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." But, nevertheless, He, pure, selfless Patriot, consented. "Not my will but Thine be done!" Thus He submitted, filling in the picture of inspired prophecy: "As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, he opened not his mouth." [1] Silently, unresistingly, heroically refusing the drugged cup, Jesus surrendered

[1] Isaiah, liii 7 (R.V.)

Himself to the uttermost of degradation and the deepest of darkness. Who shall plumb to the bottom of the pit of the unspeakable agony of His isolation in the piercing cry: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

What is the meaning of it all? That was no mere martyr's death. Otherwise, Jesus would be less than many of His own followers who went into the arena to meet the lions with a smile, and sang songs in the midst of the flames. Luminous surely now become those awful words: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." [1] The death of Jesus was not mere cessation of physical function. His death was not simply an exodus—a going out of the body. It was indeed an exodus into the darkness of separation from God as the world's Sin-bearer—"an experience of awful and unspeakable import." As the late Dr. J. H. Jowett has written: "That was death—appalling midnight in the soul, the horror of a great darkness, exceeding desolation, abandonment! That was death—the Father's house obscured, the Father's hand vanished, and the Son of God in the outer darkness, in the agonies

[1] Gal. iii. 13.

of a consuming loneliness! That was death—the sinless Saviour out there in the night, in the abandonment which is 'the wages of sin.' What we call death, Christ called sleep. 'Christ died.' Now, that homelessness of soul, that abandonment in the outer darkness, is 'the wages of sin.' But 'Christ knew no sin.' And so we are led to the music of the Gospel, which has brought cheer and assurance to a countless host, the Gospel that Christ Jesus walked that way of appalling darkness and alienation in place of His brethren. 'Christ died for the ungodly.' He died for our sins. A few soldiers with hammer and nails put Him to sleep on the Cross, but it was for the sins of a race that He died, that He voluntarily went into the outer darkness, into the awful eclipse of forsakenness and abandonment. 'He tasted death for every man.' He drank that cup for the race. 'He died for all.'" [1]

There is the heart of the Evangel. It has been truly said that while Christ "came to preach the gospel, his chief object in coming was that there might be a gospel to preach." [2] Without His Atoning Death as its basis, there could be no Gospel for a guilty race. Jonah was *willing* to be accursed if thereby he might save Israel. The "Greater

[1] *Apostolic Optimism*, pp. 181–2. [2] Dale, *The Atonement*, p. 46.

than Jonah" *became* accursed; bearing our sins "in His own body on the tree."

This book would not have been written but for the fact that its subject matter reaches to the centre and core of our Faith. Our judgment upon this Old Testament prophecy will, in no small degree, influence our answer to the fundamental question, "What think ye of Christ?" There is thus no room for indifference, shallowness or flippancy, when the challenge contained in the content of the book is presented. It is certain that critical controversies will, sooner or later, be narrowed to the great essentials; and the line of cleavage will ultimately lie between belief or unbelief in the four-square foundations of the Faith once for all delivered to the saints; viz., the authority of the Holy Scriptures, the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal value of His Atoning Death as the Sacrifice for the world's sin, and His bodily Resurrection from the dead.

It is not suggested that a belief in the historicity of Jonah's mission is to be regarded as a final test of orthodoxy. Not to construct a formula, but to try to build up belief in God's Word should be our aim. All the writer pleads for is that we shall not lightly abandon our faith in the integrity and

inspiration of the Holy Scripture, in all its parts, without sufficient reason. An outpost may appear to be of little value as a defence against the enemy; but the surrender of it may prove, in actual warfare, to lead directly to the loss of the citadel.

The supreme need of to-day is for constructors of faith, and of men who will remove the hindrances in the path of those who would fain be united to God in Christ. But the tragedy of our times is that some who ought to be guides into the Celestial City are, wittingly or unwittingly, putting stumbling-blocks on the pilgrim way. History is repeating itself. Christ, in the days of His flesh, had to reprove some of the authorised teachers of religion among His contemporaries in severe terms. "Woe unto you lawyers for ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves and those that were entering in ye hindered." The temple of Divine Truth into which the scribes should have led the people was the knowledge of God, as it was revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. But, instead of leading the people in they kept them out, shutting the door and holding the key with jealous care.

In the volume of essays entitled *Liberal Evangelicalism*, the writer of "The Bible and its Value"

makes the grave admission : " One of the reasons why the practice of Bible reading, as an integral part of the devotional life, has largely disappeared, is that many are confused and perplexed by the results of Bible scholarship, especially as these affect the Old Testament. They think that critics have destroyed the value of the Bible and reduced the Old Testament to a mass of legends." [1] That is so. But, in the same article, an example of criticism is presented which is as destructive as it is gratuitous. " A prophet Jonah," writes Canon Storr, " is mentioned in 2 Kings xiv. 25, as having lived in the reign of Jeroboam II. There may have been a tradition that he went to Nineveh. But the story of Jonah as we have it in the Book of Jonah is obviously an allegory. *Hence he may fairly be called a fictitious character.*" [2] Such a process of reasoning amazes.

A year ago, on a Sunday morning in the Mediterranean, just before Church Service in the steamer's saloon, the remark was made in the writer's hearing by an apparently educated Englishman: " There is, of course, no proof that Jesus Christ ever existed." One says, " Jonah is fictitious." Another says, " Jesus is fictitious ! " It is hardly credible that either of those asser-

[1] p. 99. [2] p. 98. The italics are mine.

tions could ever have been made, had all the evidence available been fully and fairly examined. But, is there any connection between the two? That there is cannot readily be denied. One may be said to represent the first milestone, the other the last, on the road of Biblical unbelief. The question which is becoming increasingly insistent, is, How far along the road of what is called Liberalism may one safely travel, without surrendering what is vital to Christian faith and experience? The Old Testament foundations cannot be undermined and the New Testament superstructure stand firm. The prophetic warning of Dean Alford, quoted above, given more than half a century ago, fulfilled already to such an alarming degree, shows how perilous it is to imagine that some apparently unimportant historical passage in the Old Testament may be lightly dismissed as legendary or allegorical. As the late Dr. James Orr vigorously wrote: "Only folly could imagine that it was possible to stand permanently with an advanced liberal leg in the Old Testament and a conservative leg in the New."[1] It is comparatively easy to pull down; it is hard to build the waste places that remain.

[1] *The Bible under Trial*, p. 150.

The crying need of our times is the consecrated study of the spiritual content of the Bible, of the vital message in the written Word. A man may be examined *post-mortem*. On the other hand, he may be studied as a living soul, dwelling in an earthly physical frame. His life and character, his outlook and uplook, his faith, moral integrity and spiritual insight—all these may be investigated, and the results accruing will provide real knowledge of the man. The same distinction holds, in the main, with reference to the study of the Bible. Sufficiently long has it been examined as a body or skeleton of literature, largely of man's making. The results professedly gathered thereby have been of a mixed character ; much has been as misleading as the method has been precarious. That is not to be wondered at if the Literature be instinct, as it is, with the Breath of a Divine Life.

Knowledge of content rather than criticism is our pressing need. There is much superficial discussion about things in the Bible, while often there is ignorance of the things themselves. The Book of Jonah can be read through in seven minutes. The story is compact and consistent. Experience proves,

however, that few can relate it in accurate outline from the beginning to the end. How futile it is to pronounce opinions upon matters with which one is imperfectly acquainted! Many critical difficulties disappear when the spiritual content of Scripture has been fully apprehended. In our quest of Divine truth, we need also to guard against the suggestion of mental emancipation or intellectual superiority to the things revealed. St. Paul, perhaps the most brilliantly intellectual of his generation, testified that the world had failed, through its philosophical wisdom, to find God; and it is just as true, in these days, that the knowledge of God can enter the human soul only by revelation through the medium of the written Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Whatever then tends to minimise the superlative value of the Bible, as the one certain channel of things revealed by God to man, must be challenged. There is a connection and consistency in the whole realm of the Bible revelation which must give us pause before we permit any stone to be detached from the Temple.

It is not the critical study of the Bible which is deprecated, but the assumption, as proved beyond dispute, of critical theories which represent only a passing phase of theological thought,

some of which are already in process of disintegration. The historical character of the Book of Jonah has certainly not been disproved by all that modern criticism has formulated against it. The fundamental belief in the writer's mind is that the more thoroughly the Bible is examined with all that history, science, and archæology can bring to its elucidation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the more firmly will it be trusted as "the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever."

To eliminate the miraculous will not make the Bible the more acceptable by the multitude. A revelation altogether destitute of Mystery will never satisfy the longing of the human soul. Knowledge may grow and light increase, but faith will always be an indispensable guide into the Sanctuary. And, in the last resort, the soul must rest upon the revelations of the Word Incarnate, or wander in a labyrinth of unending and unsatisfying speculation, perhaps in a realm of spiritual darkness. Jesus has proved Himself, in the experience of men, to be worthy of the uttermost of our faith and allegiance. And, when all is said, His imprimatur carries more weight than all the opinions of all critical objectors put together. The light is abundant, but the faith which

welcomes it is too often lacking. What solemn significance is to be attached to the warning that He gives in the parable which only He could have uttered. To the appeal of the rich worldly-minded infidel in Hades, in a condition of torment of realisation, retrospect and remorse, that someone should be sent to warn his five unbelieving brethren left in the world, of the peril that lies in the path of persistent unbelief, came the response: "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." When he expostulates, "Nay father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent," the final word is spoken,—one which comes to us with all the authority of the Son of God Incarnate: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." [1]

[1] St. Luke, xvi. 27–31.

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